



Influencing the Consumption Behavior of Young Adults in Germany through Influencer Marketing

Bachelor's program in Business Administration

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1. Introduction

The contemporary advertising landscape has been fundamentally reshaped by influencer marketing, and its establishment as a central feature can be observed, altering the manner in which brands engage with consumers within today's digital sphere. The role of influencers as intermediaries between businesses and consumers is amplified, as social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube become increasingly integral to daily routines. The effects of this presence on the consumption behavior of digitally engaged audiences, such as young adults in Germany, are investigated in this context. An examination of the mechanisms and implications of influencer marketing is undertaken in this term paper, with specific attention paid to its effects on the consumption behavior of young adults in Germany.

At the nexus of business, technology, and sociology, the topic of influencer marketing holds significant relevance. The expansion of digital platforms and the widespread adoption of social media have resulted in the amplification of the role played by influencers in shaping preferences and affecting purchase decisions. A particularly suitable context for this analysis is offered by Germany, a nation characterized by a high rate of internet penetration—with over 90% of individuals aged 14 and above engaging in online activities (Livadic & Brandhorst, 2019). A crucial demographic for marketers seeking the strategic utilization of influencer marketing is constituted by young adults, who spend an average of 353 minutes per day online (Livadic & Brandhorst, 2019). Enhanced understanding of contemporary marketing approaches, alongside insights into the social and psychological dynamics that exert influence on consumption in the digital age, can be achieved through examination of this subject.

The manner in which influencer marketing shapes the consumption behavior of young adults in Germany constitutes the central research question addressed in this term paper. An analysis of the factors and mechanisms that underlie this phenomenon is performed to provide an answer to this question. Consideration is given to central elements such as the roles played by trust, credibility, authenticity, and content quality in influencer marketing, in addition to comparisons between traditional and digital marketing strategies. An exploration of the interaction between social media usage, peer effects, and social pressures with the influence exerted by digital creators on the purchasing decisions of young consumers is undertaken within the analysis.

An investigation guided by a literature-based methodology is implemented, with an in-depth

review of existing research establishing the analytical foundation. Quantitative and qualitative findings, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies originating from both Germany and international contexts are integrated within the synthesis. The application of critical evaluation, comparative methods, and source criticism is implemented throughout. Reference is made in the term paper to studies such as those conducted by Shekhawat (2024), who places emphasis on trust in influencer recommendations, and Bakker (2018), who examines content relevancy and platform preferences among younger users. Furthermore, the contextualization of the findings within broader theoretical frameworks is achieved through the utilization of perspectives derived from behavioral economics and social psychology.

The increasing importance of influencer marketing as a marketing tool is underscored by current research. Substantial growth in market value has been experienced by the sector, with figures rising from \$1.7 billion in 2016 to \$9.7 billion in 2020, and forecasts exceeding \$13.8 billion in 2021 (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023). Broad consumer responsiveness is revealed by the findings, with 87% of consumers purchasing products as a result of influencer endorsements (Shekhawat, 2024). Factors identified as key include authenticity, content quality, and the perceived credibility of influencers (Al-Zahari et al., 2023; Martiningsih & Setyawan, 2022). A less comprehensive level of study, however, has been directed toward specific dynamics within the German market—such as distinct usage patterns, cultural norms, and the interplay with youth consumer behavior. The aim of this term paper is to address such gaps through the provision of a focused analysis of the German situation.

A methodical addressing of the research question and objectives is facilitated by the organization of the term paper. Initially, the fundamentals of influencer marketing are discussed, including definitions, types of influencers, and an overview of relevant social media platforms. Subsequently, attention is directed toward trust and credibility, with examination of the role of authenticity and content quality in shaping the effectiveness of campaigns. Consumer behavior is analyzed in the subsequent chapter, with particular emphasis on the digital purchase decision-making process and the influence of social phenomena such as peer effects and social pressures. Finally, the findings are synthesized in the last chapter, and a discussion of their practical implications for marketing professionals and businesses engaging with young adults in Germany is presented.

2. Fundamentals of Influencer Marketing

An understanding of influencers and the core aspects of influencer marketing helps us understand its use on the internet, in Germany, and further helps to define its value for consumer behavior and campaign success. This section will cover the different types of influencers, the platforms they use to connect with their audiences, and the elements of authenticity that are vital in building trust.

2.1 Definition and Types of Influencers

Influencer marketing can be categorized by follower count in the German context with nano-influencers (1,000–10,000 followers), micro-influencers (10,000–100,000), macro-influencers (100,000–1 million), and mega-influencers (1 million+). The differing relationships and perceived authenticity nano- and micro-influencers cultivate in comparison to their counterparts play an integral part in determining success in the German market. German consumers are skeptical of obvious advertisements and rate authenticity in the consumer's purchase intention as very high (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 1; Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71). The success of brands in the German market depends greatly on the type of influencer used for marketing campaigns.

Depending on the type of influencer chosen by a brand for marketing campaigns, there will be implications for consumer interaction and behavior. Nano- and micro-influencers are favored by brands when they are aiming for small-scale interaction with audiences and need to promote trust, authenticity, and perceived similarity. These influencers create individualized connections with their audience by engaging with consumers on a personal level via content creation and individual communication. However, they tend to have a small but highly engaged following, which does not benefit a brand that is aiming for maximum coverage (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 1). If maximum coverage is the ultimate goal of a brand, macro- and mega-influencers are chosen. They are able to deliver product advertisements to mass audiences at a rapid rate and create large-scale buzz around products but do not typically have individualized engagement with consumers (Pham et al., 2021, p. 1). German young adults view authenticity and relatability as more important than the number of followers an influencer may have, so brands seeking success in this market should focus on factors besides quantity (Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3).

The impact of an influencer on an audience's choice decisions may or may not depend solely on the number of followers, but it is influenced by the quality of the relationship the audience has with the influencer, which may include trust, interactivity, and perceived similarity. German young adults want to engage with social media content from someone they already view themselves as being digitally connected to, which is why they are more likely to respond to influencer marketing campaigns from influencers who they have interacted with previously (Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3). This means that brands may be more successful in Germany by focusing their influencer campaigns on a consumer engagement marketing model.

For influencer marketing in general, the most beneficial social media platforms are Instagram (89%) and YouTube (70%) (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71; Livadic & Brandhorst, 2019, p. 3). This is important to consider when planning out an influencer marketing strategy in order to effectively reach young adults in Germany. The success of Instagram and YouTube comes from the ability to post visual content in a short, rapid, shareable format that facilitates a deeper connection between content creator and consumer (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99).

These are the two platforms on which an influencer's content can engage consumers more effectively by humanizing a brand by creating a personal connection (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71; Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3). Features like Instagram Stories and Instagram TV (IGTV) create a more personal atmosphere for engagement. On YouTube, influencers create long-form vlogs or short, entertaining videos that invite viewers into their lives and their worlds. Influencer content on YouTube can also create a sense of authenticity for consumers because influencer recommendations are based on real consumer reviews, and real consumers often share their experiences with these products/brands in the comments.

While having many followers is crucial to an influencer's success, factors such as trust, authenticity, and active consumer interaction are better determinants of influencer marketing effectiveness. In the German context, sponsored posts will be successful only if followers have a sense of loyalty toward the influencer posting, so there is a critical importance in choosing an influencer who fits well into your target market (Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3).

Peer influence theory offers another explanation for the efficacy of influencers on young adults. This theory indicates that young adults respond to influencers as a type of friend or

acquaintance to whom they compare themselves, even if only subconsciously. In other words, they are viewed as real, living friends rather than as unattainable celebrities. By choosing influencers who fit in line with a brand's target market, the brand has the ability to connect young adult consumers by tapping into factors such as psychological need (social comparison), belonging (group conformity), or achievement (status) (Barrios-Fernández, 2023, p. 8; Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3). Peer influence theory goes in hand with the concept of authenticity because as young adults are deciding if they want to support an influencer's marketing campaign, they are subconsciously evaluating their perceived similarity.

The most critical concept that sets influencer marketing apart from celebrity endorsements and traditional advertising is consumer interaction, because it brings the advertising into a more interpersonal world. Interactivity between the consumer and influencer (and brand) is often more beneficial in the long run because the consumer has opportunities to learn more in-depth about the product/brand. By creating online communities, asking for feedback, and creating opportunities for customer input into brand decisions, influencers are engaging young adults in a way that differs greatly from mass audience advertising (Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3).

The growth in nano-influencers with personal brands and content relatable to niche audiences, instead of celebrity endorsements or large-scale, wide-coverage macro-influencers, suggests that consumers want more direct and relatable engagement from brands on social media. In this regard, nano- and micro-influencers tend to yield higher brand authenticity from German consumers and higher purchase intentions from followers (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2; Pham et al., 2021, p. 1).

Authenticity and similarity between influencers and their audience are two factors that will continue to impact influencer marketing effectiveness. For these two factors, micro-influencers appear to be more beneficial than celebrities because they garner a higher level of credibility and relatability. When trust grows, engagement strengthens, which then leads to an improved relationship between brands and consumers (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2). German brands should prioritize content that relates to their target market in order to build long-term credibility.

The shift away from celebrity endorsements and toward influencers is also indicative of how the culture surrounding social media advertising is moving away from the unobtainable. By choosing influencers who relate specifically to a product's target demographic, marketing

departments are better able to influence consumer attitudes, behavior, and purchase intention in ways that make that audience feel as though they have more control. With the digital literacy of Germany and high consumer skepticism regarding advertisement credibility, there is ample opportunity for German companies to explore these topics.

The success of influencer marketing campaigns in Germany comes from several different factors, not just the number of followers. According to Livadic & Brandhorst (2019, p. 2), Germany has very high digital literacy, with 90% of adults 14 and over online and Germans 14–29 years old spending approximately 353 minutes online daily. Instagram and TikTok have extremely strong penetration of the German internet consumer market due to their high visuality. Both Instagram and TikTok are heavily influencer-based and are growing in popularity, so companies aiming to engage young adult Germans with influencer marketing may find great success on these platforms. According to Livadic & Brandhorst, in the German context 36% of Instagram users follow influencers (2019, p. 3), so the culture is strong and has the potential to influence purchase intentions.

The digital consumer market in Germany seems to indicate a greater need for influencer content over traditionally advertised content. The impact of influencer content, for example, on German young adults' purchase intentions and attitudes may vary based on authenticity, engagement, and qualitative value. Overall, consumer-focused influencer marketing (consumer engagement) would suggest that this could be an effective strategy for brand awareness for companies targeting young adults (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99; Livadic & Brandhorst, 2019, pp. 2-3).

2.2 Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms play a crucial role in the influencer marketing strategy used when marketing towards young adults in Germany. Instagram is rated as the most influential platform by 89% of marketers. This is due to the high emphasis put on the visual and the algorithmic structure that increases discoverability of image and video-based content, and these forms of content are highly preferred in sectors such as fashion, lifestyle, and beauty. In these sectors, visual content not only supports product advertising but also the formation of one's identity (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71). That aligns very well with the interests of young adults in Germany, and the short attention spans often prevalent among this demographic. It must, however, be noted that the polished and professional aspect of

Instagram content might affect the perception of the content. Perhaps this leads to setting unrealistic consumer expectations in terms of product representation.

YouTube is regarded as a very influential platform in influencer marketing by 70% of marketers. YouTube hosts long-form content such as tutorials, reviews, and storytelling content, which influencers often use to create trust and long-term engagement with their audience (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). The majority, 60%, of all 18–34 year olds state that they are influenced by digital creators when purchasing items. This is likely influenced by the trust they have for influencers and digital creators (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). It is important to note that, in some areas, this platform might be more difficult than other social media platforms. For example, since YouTube is a long-form format, it can be argued that it is not an ideal platform when targeting younger age groups, working students, or the population in general due to the time that must be dedicated to each individual video. Brands looking to market in Germany via this platform should consider the demographics of the consumers they wish to reach.

The simultaneous prominence of Instagram and YouTube indicates that marketers are inclined to engage two very dominant platforms for their influence. Instagram's dominant role signifies rapid engagement and adoption. This can be considered a positive in influencer marketing, since its influence can boost the interest in products very rapidly as new products and trends are released (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71). While Instagram is the more popular and efficient way to market to young adult consumers in Germany, YouTube should still be considered. The influence of YouTube on young adult consumers has a more sustainable effect on consumers and their relationships with the brands. As content is available to consume for longer, it provides more continuous and long-term brand credibility compared to Instagram (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). While each platform has advantages and drawbacks, a brand in Germany might best use a hybrid approach by engaging with influencers on both platforms. Of course, this would require a much larger marketing budget and possibly more resources than the brand in question has.

Influencer style can be influenced by the culture of the platform that the content is being posted on. Instagram is much more fast-paced with quick, condensed captions and aesthetics (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017, p. 2). YouTube, as mentioned previously, is much more slow-paced with in-depth posts in which the influencers tend to speak very candidly to their audience. It can be said that the influencer is expected to adapt their communication style to match the cultural trends of each individual social media platform (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017, p. 2). Therefore, an influencer advertising product via a post on Instagram would need to

adapt their communication to a succinct summary of product benefits with a very eye-catching, eye-level image of them utilizing the product. Whereas on YouTube, that very same influencer might choose to do a video review on that product where they talk more deeply about the benefits and drawbacks. In this way, influencers can enhance the overall effectiveness of their product promotion on different social media channels. But this puts even more responsibility on the influencers. Content fatigue and/or repetitive content become concerns. If an influencer has to create different versions of essentially the same promotion across all platforms, this greatly limits how creative and original their content is, not to mention how much more time has to be dedicated to posting content.

Instagram posts that have positive responses from consumers are those where consumers already have a personal connection with the influencer (Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3). This goes back to the notions discussed earlier in this chapter regarding how the consumers perceive the influencer as a reliable source of information, therefore placing their trust in the products promoted by them. There are also multiple situational factors in influencer marketing that affect the customer (Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3). Some of these include the type of marketing. For example, if it is a sponsored post, a product placement, or a personal endorsement. It has been proven that influencer collaborations are more appealing to consumers when the collaboration has transparency regarding which brand is being advertised (Riedl & von Luckwald, 2019, p. 3). Many influencers will incorporate the sponsored brand subtly into the background of posts, and while this may be effective for many campaigns, most consumers would rather have full transparency when it comes to this kind of content. Again, it appears that one of the largest drivers for influencer marketing lies within the notion of trust. If consumers in Germany do not feel they can trust the influencer's credibility in marketing products, then they will also not believe the marketing campaign's message.

Therefore, if trust and familiarity with influencers directly affect consumers, then higher consumer response rates are more likely when those consumers also follow influencers that are of the same group. In order to receive higher conversion rates, the most effective strategy would be to promote an influencer who primarily attracts the target consumer. While this sounds very basic, marketing campaigns tend to focus on the influence of the celebrity. By choosing an influencer based solely on their follower count without taking into account their target audience, this opens the door for the wrong consumer. For example, a marketing campaign aimed at young women is better served by hiring female influencers. Even though there may be male influencers who specialize in the product being advertised, women tend to be more easily influenced by other women and not men. In addition, most young adult

males would likely not have interest in what a female influencer is promoting. It can be concluded that in order for influencer marketing strategies to be successful with target consumers in Germany, influencers hired for marketing campaigns must also target the same specific market demographics and groups as the campaign itself.

Additionally, research shows that a little over 80% of content created by blogs is by female content creators, in terms of fashion, beauty, and lifestyle products (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017, p. 5). This reinforces the notions made above that female consumers tend to be more easily influenced by women when it comes to the purchase of lifestyle products and services. However, there has been much more development in this part of marketing. Consumers are becoming less influenced by this method, since many of them are losing trust in influencers due to how oversaturated this strategy has become. With the vast majority of influencer posts being from women, there is not much room to cater to male audiences unless there is some sort of special event or promotion that has become highly trendy, and in this case, the products may vary, not just lifestyle and fashion products. Since males do not comprise the main group being marketed towards, they run the risk of being unfulfilled and possibly not loyal to the brands involved in these strategies.

Timing of campaign and content release also plays an important role in the success rate of the campaign. Research shows that consumers in Europe generally engage the most between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. on a Sunday night (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017, p. 5). This allows companies hiring influencers to predict the periods of highest levels of online consumer engagement, meaning that by posting during those periods, campaign efficiency may also increase. Of course, as the campaign and brand move across different areas of Europe, there will likely be other, optimal periods to target. In addition, by primarily focusing on these periods in order to enhance traffic, marketers should be wary of oversaturation. This leads to consumers being overexposed to these kinds of advertisements and can negatively impact conversion rates.

These are only a handful of the considerations that need to be made when marketing campaigns that incorporate influencer marketing strategy. There has been some concern that marketing campaigns tend to be based around the influence of the celebrity promoting the product. Many people do not realize that while an influencer's follower base affects their ability to impact the market, what also greatly impacts them is the analytical data received through collaborations. Companies receive massive quantities of analytical data from influencers they collaborate with for advertisements, sponsored content, promotions, and more. This allows these companies to optimize their campaigns through the specific patterns

and trends they collect on consumer engagement. So, when asking the question as to why more companies are leaning more towards influencer collaborations over those of celebrity endorsements, there is more to it than just a shift of consumers from broadcast media to digital sources. In the marketing campaigns targeting young adults in Germany, the use of analytics provides a deeper and more sustainable insight into what trends are prevalent among target customers and provides feedback that can be tailored for the next campaign to target more effectively. It also must be considered that most customers follow people who share their same views, interests, and tastes. If, hypothetically speaking, 5,000 customers all follow a male influencer, that could lead to at least 5,000 followers within the account of each marketing campaign the influencer partners in. By gathering analytics from influencers on which social media platforms get the most traffic, or even which consumers tend to have more of an interest in the marketing message and the advertisement of products or promotions, companies can customize the overall outreach and the target market as they work towards growth.

However, while analytics are a powerful method for optimizing any marketing campaign, it also is a dangerous ethical factor. The way technology has changed to make life simpler, and the way the internet collects data about almost all of us, makes all consumers the easy victims of companies that use data analysis for influencing their purchasing decisions. Since influencer marketing involves celebrities with mass followings, these ethical boundaries blur even further. As mentioned earlier, marketing strategies now more than ever tend to emphasize psychological impact, in hopes that it will increase the likelihood of consumers making a purchase. But is it moral to knowingly utilize data and psychological tricks on unknowing customers who are vulnerable and desperate to seek happiness in their lives in order to make a purchase?

Young adults spend more than three hours daily on social media (Chrisniyanti & Fah, 2022, p. 2), making it the most popular arena to advertise in. This extensive screen time has allowed social media to become a popular place for marketing practices to target them. With so much traffic on various social media platforms, influencers have more ease connecting with them, which can ultimately lead to sales if they are loyal and passionate about their influencer and the products they are promoting (Chrisniyanti & Fah, 2022, p. 14). When customers are frequently exposed to influencer content, they are more likely to become aware of a product and purchase it. Therefore, repeat exposure is a valuable concept to adopt into a marketing campaign (Chrisniyanti & Fah, 2022, p. 14). But, with so many campaigns being sent to users every day, customers may begin to be unaware of marketing advertisements when exposed to them frequently. They also may begin to think that

everything is the same as the rest of what they see every day on social media and, in turn, may completely ignore and disregard influencer marketing campaigns and content. The best way for brands to be heard is to be unique and stand out from the crowd in order to gain traffic. It is best to use few but very high-quality content posts and make sure each post stands out from the previous. It is helpful to create quality content on one platform at a time in order to make sure content does not repeat itself and stands out.

Influencer marketing in Europe can benefit from the demographics as well. It has been proven that most of the European consumers who participate in and follow social media are employed, and the average age of users is 27 years old (Baracscai et al., 2021, p. 11). A younger age group, or even slightly older groups, would likely have less money, but with the demographics leaning more towards employment, this allows campaigns to cater to their demographic's economic class. In addition, since there is an average age of 27, most of the population is probably in their mid-level stage in terms of occupation, relationship, finances, and more. By keeping that in mind, it can increase the likelihood of attracting more of your target market, as many individuals can relate to one another as they share various levels of life stages (Baracscai et al., 2021, p. 11).

3. Trust and Credibility Factors

Trust and credibility are at the basis of influencer marketing and shape how young Germans see and engage with influencers online. By focusing on authenticity, transparency, and high content quality, trust and credibility determine consumer relationships and long-term loyalty. In this section, the aspects of authenticity, content quality, and transparency are discussed in depth to see what makes influencer content convincing.

3.1 Authenticity in Influencer Marketing

Authenticity is a key factor in the success of influencer marketing among young adults in Germany. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents have purchased an item based on authentic recommendations (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2). So, it seems to be the main reason, even more important than the price. Since authenticity is the most valued attribute, it would be interesting to evaluate what makes an influencer authentic or relatable to young adult

consumers. This aspect is difficult to evaluate. When a consumer says an influencer is authentic or relatable, are they just referring to being transparent? How can we ensure an influencer's authenticity when they work with a brand?

The importance of relatable stories with positive and negative sides contributes to transparency and makes influencer posts less promotional and more like real feedback (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 4). Even though storytelling makes influencers relatable and transparent, is there a moment in which these stories start to not be authentic anymore because it is being sponsored? What kind of information can we rely on when measuring or analyzing something so sensitive?

Authentic influencers are the ones who tend to trigger sales to young adult German consumers. The correlation between these variables has a correlation coefficient $r = 0.65$ ($p < 0.05$) (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 4). However, as seen previously, these numbers can lead to certain biases. We must recognize the qualitative complexity and the context behind those numbers.

According to Shekhawat (2024, p. 2), authenticity plays a critical role for the nano- or micro-influencer categories, which may not be considered highly credible by the younger generation; the nano- and micro-influencer groups may have very connected followers who might perceive them as a regular peer in their community. In contrast, macro-influencers tend to lose personal connection and believability as their number of followers grows significantly; this would imply the higher credibility and effectiveness of nano- or micro-influencers.

There is an emotional engagement from the followers regarding digital creators (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). Young adults in Germany report that they "feel much more attached to YouTube channels than to celebrities, television or cinemas." 70% of teenage YouTube users feel connected to their digital creator, compared to other forms of media. How much does authenticity help digital creators build strong relationships with their audiences?

Storytelling, real-life experiences, and challenges are critical parts of an influencer's personality and make them approachable to audiences (Chandrakala et al., 2024, p. 2). How does storytelling help or challenge an influencer's credibility? Does storytelling help enhance their image or make it more sensitive to changes?

An influencer's transparency about sponsorships and ads also helps increase the likelihood of the consumer's trust. A vast majority of people surveyed agree that advertising or sponsorships should be included and specified (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 44). How transparent should influencers be regarding ads and sponsorships? Is it always possible to be transparent, or will transparency become secondary if influencers do not share any other content?

Regarding the younger generation in Germany, the survey results show that they tend to be more loyal to brands after purchasing a product recommended by a credible influencer (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 5). Does this mean that the younger generation is more brand loyal due to social media influencers than other generations? If they are more likely to engage, are there specific factors that influence that engagement? Is it because of authenticity? Does the product quality impact loyalty?

Follower engagement post-purchase is crucial, and influencers often maintain personal connections with their followers. An influencer's promptness at replying to a comment and being accessible to followers can help build or strengthen loyalty in the long term (Kutz et al., 2024, p. 5). But can influencers truly establish that engagement if their following is so large that they would never interact with these individuals otherwise?

Sixty-three percent of the respondents in this study expressed that their purchasing habits are influenced by influencers on social media (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 5). It is also the second reason that the sample participants stated for following influencers on social media channels, with only 1% less than the main reason, to have fun. Social media influencers are increasingly being used as effective promoters, and according to Forbes (2024), they are believed to "improve sales, improve branding, boost awareness, increase customer engagement, connect to an audience and gather valuable insight." Does influencer marketing create better customers than traditional methods because of engagement with credible content and influencers?

If the younger generations want influencers to engage and share credible content but also only want to follow them if they have fun, do younger generations perceive that influencer market research is enjoyable?

Shekhawat (2024, p. 5) also states that influencers, most of the time, do not endorse similar brands as macro-influencers. Micro-influencer audiences may want more relatable advertisements with fewer promotions. If the younger generation doesn't mind seeing

promotional content, what is more impactful to their consumer behavior, credibility or relatability?

The respondents in the study mentioned that they feel more attached to YouTube creators than they do to celebrities. Álvarez-Monzoncillo (2023, p. 99) shares that 70% of respondents stated that they “feel much more attached to YouTube channels than to celebrities, television, or cinemas.” As seen in previous pages, celebrity endorsement is beginning to die off, with influencer marketing gaining more steam in this generation's purchasing preferences. Does celebrity or influencer impact come from relatability, credibility, and/or connection with the personality behind it?

Young adults are drawn to the personalities, stories, and relatability of influencers. This also contributes to greater purchase intention (Chan, 2022, p. 28). Traditional advertising and celebrities do not impact purchase decisions nearly as much. Why is authenticity and relatability so vital?

How do traditional theories on celebrity endorsement apply to influencers, if they apply at all? Shekhawat (2024, p. 2) mentions that micro-influencers' authenticity plays a critical role and may not be considered credible by young adults. On the contrary, a study mentions that micro-influencers and nano-influencers are “considered highly credible” to the audiences because the influencer may be more in the audiences' day-to-day lives (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 44). There is a significant disconnect between both of these viewpoints of how influencers are credible, so what is accurate?

If authenticity is lost, the damage will be quick because people would not be able to trust the influencer anymore (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 44). Why does authenticity make trust and believability grow more quickly in social media? What makes that engagement more than what traditional methods can achieve?

The challenge with social media is that fake content or fake engagement is often what drives attention (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 44). Social media engagement happens with fake news (70%) at a higher percentage than for content that is reliable. How can engagement rates grow without losing believability or sharing questionable content?

According to Kutz et al. (2024, p. 20), most consumers are more distrusting and have less purchase intention because an influencer's values do not match the products that they are endorsing. Why does incongruity in beliefs decrease credibility?

In general, research in countries like Germany and the UK mentions that trustworthiness and authenticity in social media drive credibility and purchasing (Chan, 2022, p. 28). Even in Japan, credibility and authenticity were identified as crucial for customers. As the younger generation buys and prefers from trusted brands and influencers, why do the younger generations have a lower interest in “identifying with other consumers, communicating information, expressing opinions, recommending products, expressing and sharing attitudes, exchanging information and support with others in order to develop a positive relationship with these community members, and creating an emotional commitment toward each other” (Lin & Junaid, 2023)? How does that contribute or take away from the idea of brand loyalty in the social media sphere?

The personal traits of the influencer also affect believability in influencer credibility. They are also perceived as reliable due to their communication and their skills in a specific industry (Chan, 2022, p. 28). Personal traits were rated to influence trustworthiness 72.50% of the time, while skills in the specific industry influence trustworthiness 27.50% of the time. Why are they believed? Why do consumers take a specific influencer as truthful compared to others? Why does personal quality outweigh influencer skill at the rate of almost 3 to 1?

Influence on consumer behavior also happens from content credibility and influencers' credibility. When there is an alignment between them, and they share content that meets the wants and needs of young German adults, the content will be relatable, shareable, and consumers may follow the influencers on social media channels (Kutz et al., 2024, p. 5).

Humanized Version in German:

Authentizität ist ein Schlüssel zum Erfolg im Influencer-Marketing bei jungen deutschen Erwachsenen. Achtundachtzig Prozent der Probanden haben etwas gekauft aufgrund von glaubwürdigen Empfehlungen (Shekhawat, 2024, S. 2). Authentizität scheint der Hauptgrund zu sein, warum junge Erwachsene in Deutschland durch diese Art von Marketing beeinflusst werden. Da Authentizität die meist geschätzte Eigenschaft bei einem Influencer ist, ist es notwendig zu analysieren, was ein Influencer auf Social Media Plattformen tun muss, um für diese junge Generation glaubwürdig und relatable zu sein. Doch da Authentizität ein eher abstraktes Konstrukt ist, ist es fraglich, ob diese Qualität wirklich in Worte zu fassen und damit messbar gemacht werden kann. Wenn Kunden Authentizität und Relatability mit Transparenz und Glaubwürdigkeit gleichsetzen, wie können wir sicherstellen, dass der Influencer, mit dem wir zusammenarbeiten wollen, diese Faktoren erfüllt und nicht durch die Verpflichtung, Geld für ein Posting zu machen, seine Glaubwürdigkeit und seine

Authentizität einbüßt?

Die Wichtigkeit von positiven und negativen Geschichten bei einer Produktempfehlung macht ein Social Media Posting transparenter und glaubhafter als ein traditioneller Produktpromotionspost (Shekhawat, 2024, S. 4). Auch wenn die Geschichte von dem Influencer selbst, über Probleme mit dem Produkt und alles andere, das ihn näher an das Publikum rückt, hilft, wie transparent kann so ein Influencer sein? Wäre es nicht nachvollziehbar, dass der Influencer mit einer gewissen Angst postet, die seine Story unauthentisch macht? Es ist klar, dass junge Erwachsene eine gute Balance bei einem Posting wollen, sie wollen, dass der Influencer so glaubhaft ist wie sie selbst, und sie wollen sich mit ihm identifizieren. Doch wie können sie einem Influencer oder einer Marke wirklich vertrauen? Woher wissen sie, wie glaubhaft das ist, was sie gepostet haben?

Das Influencer-Marketing für die jüngere Generation auf Social Media scheint sehr hilfreich zu sein. Doch diese These muss nun noch auf ihre Plausibilität hin getestet werden, da sie zwar einige Belege hat, sich jedoch lediglich auf qualitative Literatur bezieht und keinen quantitativen Daten, Zahlen, Korrelationen oder Diagramme anführt. Es ist daher fraglich, ob diese Annahme wirklich valide ist.

Einfluss, den authentische Influencer auf Verkäufe haben, kann messbar sein. Die Beziehung hat einen Korrelationswert $r = 0.65$ ($p < 0.05$) (Shekhawat, 2024, S. 4). Obwohl die Daten und Korrelationen hilfreich sind, das Verständnis für die Faktoren, die die Beliebtheit der Influencer bei den jüngeren Generationen bewirken, ist schwierig, weil die Daten in quantitativer Form zu sehen sind und nicht aus qualitativer Perspektive. Man sieht die Antworten und die Zahlen, aber es bleiben Fragen: „Woher wissen Kunden, ob jemand glaubhaft ist?“, „Warum hat jemand Erfolg damit, sein Produkt zu verkaufen, und der andere nicht? Was haben die Kunden gelesen? Wie war der Influencer, mit dem sie gelesen haben? War der Influencer selbst glaubhaft?“

Die Authentizität spielt vor allem für die nano- bis mikro-Influencer die größte Rolle. nano- oder mikro-Influencer, als nicht credible Influencer bekannt, scheinen nur dann eine große Beliebtheit bei der jüngeren Generation zu haben, wenn die Kunden ihnen glauben, ihre Geschichte authentisch finden und so der nano-Influencer wie ein direkter Kontakt und wie ein Peer wahrgenommen werden kann (Shekhawat, 2024, S. 2). Bei den macro-Influencern scheint die Glaubwürdigkeit der weniger populären Influencer nicht unbedingt gegeben. Bei dem nano- und mikro-Influencer scheint es hingegen sehr wahrscheinlich, dass, wenn es einer geschafft hat, auf dieser Ebene zu bleiben, es auch ein Indikator für jemanden aus

seinem Freundeskreis sein kann. Doch ist es noch immer die Frage, ob die größere Auswahl von Influencern bei dem niedrigeren Publikum nicht viel größere Chancen liefert, an Authentizität zu bleiben als bei den Influencern, die so beliebt sind, dass sie sich nicht um Interaktionen kümmern müssen und bei denen auch ein viel größerer Unterschied im wirtschaftlichen Bereich besteht als bei den kleineren Influencern. Es kann also sein, dass die höhere Beliebtheit der micro- und nano-Influencer nicht mit mehr Authentizität verbunden sein muss, sondern mit dem Mangel an besseren Möglichkeiten.

Junge Erwachsene geben auch an, dass sie eine große Bindung zu ihrem Lieblingsinfluencer haben (Álvarez

3.2 Content Quality Assessment

High-quality content in influencer marketing to younger generations is made through beautiful imagery, posts with consistent messaging, and posts containing a lot of information. Research found that consumers interacting more with posts that had more visual content and informative texts showed that “quality content” is also found with visuals as well as the message conveyed (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2). High-quality posts, such as on Instagram and YouTube, are found in 76.67% of posts. However, it is important to note that content quality is in the eyes of the beholder, and it is crucial to understand if consumers seek beautiful content or authentic and raw content.

Content quality heavily influences purchasing intentions as 87% of consumers purchase based on an influencer’s recommendation (Shekhawat, 2024, pp. 2, 4). With $r = 0.65$ and $p < 0.05$, influencer engagement positively correlates with purchasing intention, meaning content quality can result in positive outcomes for companies. The correlation illustrates the effectiveness of good content creation from influencers that drive purchasing behavior from customers. However, there is only a measured quantitative analysis, and more analysis needs to be conducted regarding a qualitative perspective to assess the psychological factors that contribute to purchasing intention through effective content creation from influencers.

One way of content creation in influencing consumer purchase intention in influencer marketing is to connect personally with consumers by showing posts that are relevant and contain a personal experience with the products or services advertised. As Instagram and

YouTube are platforms that contain visual content, influencers can provide a tutorial of using products with detailed information of how to utilize products as well as stating product limitations or storytelling (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). This benefits the brands as it is not seen as traditional advertising. However, the authenticity of this personal experience is questionable as the influencers gain payment from the advertising.

Influencer attractiveness, credibility (or expertise), and genuineness (or experience with product) contribute to consumer purchase intention with 49% (Martiningsih & Setyawan, 2022, p. 1). Therefore, it can be implied that attractive people on the internet can get paid to advertise a company through their relatability and “influence” in creating a good image to drive consumer purchases. A concern may arise regarding the lack of transparency as this type of marketing is dependent on consumer acceptance of one specific influencer personality over others.

Furthermore, if content is not seen as highly honest, the trustworthiness of an influencer does not increase purchase intention (Martiningsih & Setyawan, 2022, p. 1). This calls for the dual considerations of consumers regarding influencer marketing by evaluating the influencer with a quantitative perspective as well as assessing content through qualitative analyses. Consumer judgment is considered by the content provided by the influencer. It will be important to gauge and understand content and influencer assessment from both sides.

An intersection occurs at expertise in specialized content and content quality. Influencers in the fashion and lifestyle niche often build a loyal following through highly relevant content that caters to a particular audience. This connection allows them to enhance feelings of identification and exclusivity to the brand that amplifies the influencer’s endorsement (Bakker, 2018, p. 6). Over-targeting a specific niche can run the risk of excluding demographics.

Furthermore, consumers prefer content to be extremely relevant to them, meaning that roughly 66% of responders preferred the content made from an influencer to be relatable (Bakker, 2018, p. 6). Whether they are a gaming influencer, a hobby influencer, or an educational influencer, young consumers of Germany often choose to engage in content that is tailored to them and aligns with the struggles that they are facing or the types of trends that they like. It is important to remember that consumer interest is always shifting, which must always be in mind when creating content.

Another specialization for content quality for the effect on consumer purchase intention can

also be made in fashion and lifestyle influencers, in addition to other topics regarding younger generations, like travel influencers. This can be a beneficial technique to increase the number of followers and build a positive relationship with them, creating a more loyal consumer following (Bakker, 2018, p. 6). This specialization may also be risky, however, because the lack of diverse influencers may create an unrealistic representation of beauty.

The adaptability of content that adapts to cultural trends and digital engagement helps ensure content quality stays afloat for a longer period of time. The content made, no matter how good it may be, may lose momentum and engagement if influencers are not adapting to the changing cultural trends in the market as well as the content created for social media is also going through changes with trending transitions and popular audio content.

Peer acceptance impacts content credibility, indicating that 46.6% of young adults are heavily influenced by the product choices of their friends and family (Mavale & Soni, 2018, p. 4). This shows that content is seen as credible if close circles follow influencers. Social pressure can influence consumer decisions. If products or services are promoted well enough by content through influencers, it is more likely that peers will consider them to be more trustworthy as well as more suitable for their needs. However, there is a risk of causing negative opinions on consumers due to the overemphasis on brand influence and personal preference.

Peer pressure is a great example of the social influence on branded purchase intention of young adults in Germany. Product sales are directly proportional to how many peer comments, likes, and mentions the product has and are used to express their purchase intent. Peer groups impact how credible influencer content is by spreading positivity and influencing each other in a domino effect (Mavale & Soni, 2018, p. 5). A product may be well-reviewed for its quality and features on a post or a blog, but it is more credible if a peer, a familiar face and identity, gives the same comments. This is because consumers who like the same things will feel more trust for peers since they may have some relation or similarity in preferences.

Overall, the better influencer content is, paired with the other contributing factors of trustworthiness, attractiveness, and genuineness from influencers, the more the audience will believe that the influencers are reliable in what they are saying. When peers agree, the credibility is more heightened as there is a sense of trust through common preferences. It is imperative that influencer content is of utmost quality, meaning authenticity and relevance are both critical factors.

4. Consumer Behavior Analysis

An overview of how young adult consumers in Germany make digital purchasing decisions gives an idea of the influence of influencer marketing on their day-to-day digital experiences. By analyzing their information search, evaluation, and cues, we can understand how their digital purchasing decisions are made.

4.1 Digital Decision-Making Process

The impact of influencer marketing on the digital purchase decision process among young adults in Germany becomes apparent when researching and comparing multiple alternatives. From a research perspective, it has been suggested that "87% of consumers purchase a product or service due to an influencer's recommendation, and 49% of consumers rely on influencers to guide them in their purchasing choices" (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2). As evidenced in this research, the use of influencers is not limited to introducing alternatives; they can also lead and advise consumers in their purchase decision process.

However, this information does not depict the entire reality. Rather than simply relying on information offered through influencer content, young adults in Germany search for multiple alternatives, reviews, or experiences with products and/or brands. As indicated by research, young adults prefer to rely on digital content provided through peers (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99).

During the search of multiple alternatives, influencers can impact the digital purchase decision process by being perceived as more credible and relatable than celebrity endorsements. While influencer marketing's impact remains strong, many young adults evaluate these endorsements and often search for corroboration by seeking feedback and opinions from peers before purchasing a product. Once multiple alternatives are examined, it appears young adults in Germany begin their evaluation.

When reducing alternatives to an eventual purchase option, influencer marketing may be utilized in a way that differentiates the product/brand from various substitutes. If an

influencer that the target demographic follows prefers one alternative, consumers may feel compelled to purchase that product/brand as well. While other aspects come into play in the final decision process, influencers can greatly sway the elimination of alternatives, leaving the consumer with their best choice.

Two common platforms that young adults utilize to research multiple alternatives are YouTube and Instagram. YouTube primarily influences decision-making through providing the consumer with visual evidence (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71), while Instagram serves its customers through providing visual evidence as well, along with consumer feedback and interaction (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2).

While social media channels provide valuable content that influences the digital purchase decision process, they also have algorithm preferences that can influence search results for multiple alternatives. It is possible that brands or influencers pay additional fees for certain algorithms that lead their content to the top of the page to be seen more. These practices can skew the consumer's experience of browsing multiple alternatives and limit it to the ones that pay the most.

Due to the increase in digitalization among young adults, this has become an integral and essential aspect of the digital purchase decision process. Young adults in Germany spend more time on the internet, browsing websites and browsing through various social media channels (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). As a result, influencers have been more impactful on their digital purchase decision process, due to them browsing the platforms mentioned above to research alternatives.

Although it is estimated that the majority of young adults are more likely to purchase from influencers, due to multiple alternatives, not all purchases are based on such influencers, celebrities, advertisements, or digital content, but can be based on personal factors (Chan, 2022, p. 28).

While certain digital trends play into influencers, the negative aspect is the risk of providing false claims (Chan, 2022, p. 28). With this increased influencer presence, there is greater risk, and more credibility must be built into influencer marketing, specifically, so that it continues to be an integral source to young adults, influencing their purchase decision.

Trust plays an important role in influencing the digital purchase decision process of young adults, and the utilization of influencers allows for a higher level of trust, with increased

authenticity (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2; Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). With that said, influencer marketing can potentially be improved by ensuring authenticity and reliability, which enhances the brand and credibility for young adults, therefore, influencing the evaluation of multiple alternatives by increasing brand loyalty (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2).

An additional factor that plays into influencers and decision-making is the use of a good brand image or personal image, creating relatable stories that consumers would like to be or can imagine being a part of (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). Due to this relatability aspect, if the product/brand can be linked and recommended by the influencer, this aspect may highly influence and motivate the consumers during the evaluation of the product/brand and/or competitors (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2).

Several aspects lead to better influencer marketing results and brand images, with most emphasizing the importance of authenticity and relatability, in contrast to advertisement style campaigns. In addition to the above factors that increase reliability, additional trends such as being transparent and an expert in a specific niche in influencer marketing positively impacted consumer engagement (Al-Zahari et al., 2023, p. 6). As with relatability and personal brand image, consumers are more likely to engage with what is deemed an expert as well, and authenticity leads to less distrust.

The quality of an influencer's posts, combined with authenticity and honesty and other personal disclosure, are most of the reasoning that makes this approach of marketing impactful (Chan, 2022, p. 28). It can influence how young adults make decisions, whether it is purchase and engagement with products, services, and/or brands. With increased digital trends, these factors also need to stay high within influencers to have a lasting impact and not be disrupted by new technology and communication factors.

When it comes to consistency with positive interactions and the use of multiple alternatives, the repetition of positive interaction and engagement leads to loyalty and the perception of a trustworthy brand, therefore, reducing the chance of distrust from consumers (Al-Zahari et al., 2023, p. 6).

Influencer marketing can be enhanced by ensuring honesty, reliability, and authenticity. In the previous step in the purchase funnel, evaluating alternatives, we learn that it is crucial to have multiple options. It appears that, by choosing to reduce alternatives to what the target audience deems most valuable, the most important step in evaluation is transparency and trustworthiness, to have potential consumers perceive that, no matter how many

alternatives, the advertised product, brand, or service is the best, due to reliability. The other step in reducing alternatives, building loyalty and retaining customers, is very related to reliability and credibility, due to trust.

The attitude-behavior gap in Germany appears to impact influencer marketing by having a lot of young adults agree with the concept and ideals promoted through influencers, with the hopes to purchase, but ultimately not doing so. In Germany, "65% of consumers indicated that they want to purchase from a sustainable brand, and only 26% actually purchased" (Bocti et al., 2021, p. 2). Influencers must influence not just the attitudes but ultimately change the behavior of these potential young adult buyers in Germany.

Often, potential buyers have a gap in the knowledge of the product or the product is deemed unaffordable, so the potential buyer purchases an alternative (Bocti et al., 2021, p. 3). This concept alone can limit the purchase and influence the decision-making of young adults, due to potential differences between income bracket and other limitations on the consumer's capabilities to purchase or attain these desired products.

By closing the gap between attitude and behavior, influencers must promote more of the available options for purchase and the actual capabilities of purchase (Bocti et al., 2021, p. 8). If people can visualize the potential benefits that may come from sustainable options with affordable prices, then the behavior of purchasing may be influenced more and ultimately change their attitudes toward sustainable products, services, or brands.

The utilization of influencers and content creators can significantly impact German young adults, influencing their preferences for multiple alternatives in product/brand evaluation. A survey showed, "70% of teenagers that use YouTube reported feeling more connected to YouTube than celebrities" (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). The aspect of relatability plays a part in influencing consumers as part of digital and influencer marketing, due to the increased use of digital marketing on Instagram and YouTube (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71), which often involves connecting with digital influencers in addition to celebrities, as well as providing digital content and multiple alternatives.

Influence has impacted the transition from consumers to partners, a community of people who have the ability to influence each other and are open and excited to interact within this community (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). Through the use of influencers, especially digital content creators, there is a high potential for customers in the German target market to develop a partnership that not only changes their decision-making in the purchase of

multiple alternatives, but, from the business perspective, also increases the brand recognition by providing constant and personal interactions.

Overall, the steps of the purchase funnel impacted the digital purchase decision process of young adults in Germany through various methods:

- Recognizing a gap in services and/or product capabilities and/or preferences (need recognition)
- Information is collected and analyzed to ensure multiple alternatives can be evaluated (search of multiple alternatives)
- Multiple alternatives are compared to reduce alternatives (evaluation of alternatives)
- Consumer begins purchase, based on top 3 options from evaluating (purchase)
- Consumer is happy/unhappy with service/product and begins next evaluation process/stops purchase process (post-purchase evaluation)

4.2 Social Influence on Purchases

Der Einfluss von Freunden und Bekannten, die Kaufentscheidungen von Konsumenten und Konsumentinnen in Deutschland zu beeinflussen, spielt bei Influencer Marketing eine essenzielle Rolle. Die Peer-Validierung auf Social Media unterstützt die Beliebtheit und Begierde nach dem Produkt. Das Feedback wie Likes, Kommentare und Shares auf den Posts dienen als sozialer Beweis für ein positives und anerkanntes Produkt im digitalen Umfeld (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). Die Nutzung dieser Mechanismen nutzt das Phänomen aus, dass Menschen ihre Entscheidungen an das soziale Umfeld anpassen. Das Anpassen an Trends und Tendenzen kann jedoch ethisch bedenklich sein, da sich ein Mensch beim Kauf unter Druck gesetzt fühlen kann und sich dieser nicht mehr auf eigene Prinzipien und Urteile bezieht.

Das ständige Verwenden der Produkte, der Follower und Followerinnen der Influencer/innen, beeinflusst die anderen User in ihrer Kaufentscheidung und führt dazu, dass das Herdenverhalten an Bedeutung gewinnt. Werden Produkte von mehreren Influencern und Influencerinnen promotet, wollen viele junge Erwachsene ebenfalls die Produkte besitzen und mit dem Trend gehen. Elektronische Mundpropaganda und Interaktion mit Freunden und Bekannten führen zu einem höheren impulsiven Kaufverhalten (Abdullah & Artanti, 2021, p. 10). Dies kann dazu führen, dass ein Großteil der User in Kauf- und Rauschrausch

verfallen kann und sich dadurch die Individualität verschwindet.

Auf Influencer Marketing ist diese Reaktion stärker als bei traditionellem Marketing, da sich die jungen Konsumenten und Konsumentinnen leichter mit Influencern und Influencerinnen identifizieren können, weil diese sich für User auf ihrem Level befinden, auf Social Media (Instagram und YouTube) anzufinden sind und sofortiges Feedback auf ihre Beiträge erhalten, sei es gut oder schlecht. All dies bewirkt eine unmittelbare Kaufmotivation (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). Jedoch sind die unmittelbaren Kaufmotive oft unkontrollierte, impulsive Reaktionen aufgrund des Einflusses der sozialen Netzwerke. Daher ist es wichtig, im Influencer Marketing eine verantwortungsvolle Methode einzusetzen, um die Kontrolle der Konsumenten und Konsumentinnen in ihre eigene Hand zu bringen.

Vertrauenswürdigkeit und Identifizierbarkeit sind weitere wichtige Punkte auf Social Media, die dazu beitragen, einen Kunden oder Kundin langfristig zu binden. Influencer/innen müssen mit ihren Followern und Followerinnen ehrlich und offen kommunizieren, da ein Influencer-Post als überzeugend empfunden wird, wenn dieser durch Ehrlichkeit zum Ausdruck gebracht wird (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2). Wenn die Verbraucher oder Verbraucherinnen feststellen können, dass ein Influencer oder eine Influencerin sich mit dem Produkt identifizieren kann, kann dieser durch das Überzeugen mit eigenen Erfahrungen zu einem regelmäßigen Kauf animieren (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 5). Je mehr Werbung jedoch ein Influencer oder Influencerin macht, desto geringer wird die Vertrauenswürdigkeit durch die kommerzielle Tendenz.

Die Empfehlung der Influencer/innen auf Social Media hat im Vergleich zu traditioneller Werbung oft einen stärkeren Einfluss auf die Emotionen von Kunden und Kundinnen, da diese ihnen näherstehen als ein Prominenter aus der TV-Werbung. Durch die starke soziale Bindung zum Influencer oder zur Influencerin steigert sich das Vertrauen, und der Kunde oder die Kundin tendiert dazu, dieses Produkt oder diese Marke öfters zu kaufen (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 99). Daher werden auch Marken-Communities gebildet, indem die Influencer/innen über längere Zeit hinweg einen Bezug zu Produkten oder Marken aufbauen. Je offener ein Influencer/in mit Sponsoring umgeht, desto höher ist auch das Vertrauen (Shekhawat, 2024, p. 2).

Da die Konsumenten und Konsumentinnen mit sozialem Kontakt in Gruppen aufwachsen, versuchen diese sich an das gesamte Gruppenideal anzupassen. Dies ist insbesondere in der Generation Z zu beobachten, da sich diese sehr für Kollektivität interessiert und viele Marken das nachhaltige Wirtschaften und das gesellschaftliche Denken und Handeln

ebenfalls vertreten. Durch die Möglichkeit, auf Social Media die Präferenzen des Kollektivs rasch zu übernehmen, führt es dazu, dass sich Trends schnell durchsetzen (Li & Hassan, 2023, p. 3). Das Phänomen von Gruppenswängen wird in den digitalen Medien immer mehr zu einer Herausforderung. Influencer/innen spielen in diesen Netzwerken eine Rolle, in dem sie schnell für eine Verbreitung kollektiver Trends sorgen. Ethische Probleme kann diese Situation mit sich ziehen, wenn die Gruppenideale fälschlicherweise in Beiträgen präsentiert werden oder von falschen Behauptungen über eine Firma die Rede ist. Ein Nachhaltigkeitsideal zu vertreten, obwohl die Organisation nichts dergleichen macht, führt dazu, dass ein Unternehmen viel seiner Identität verliert.

Da viele soziale Medien wie Instagram oder YouTube direkt interaktive Tools wie Kommentarspalten, Umfrageboxen oder Fragemöglichkeiten in den Storys enthalten, können sich Meinungen der User immer wieder ändern oder in eine bestimmte Richtung verstärkt werden (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023, p. 71). So lassen sich Meinungsänderungen in der Zielgruppe auf einen Konsens zurückführen, der in einem geschlossenen Netzwerk stattfindet und Meinungsdiversität kaum zulässt.

Da sich junge Erwachsene gerne an das im Internet gezeigte Kaufverhalten orientieren, kommt es zu einem Phänomen der Imitation. Dies tritt am häufigsten auf, wenn Influencer oder Influencerinnen ihre Gefühle offenbaren und mit dem Verweis ihrer Kompetenz in ihrem Nischenbereich angeben (Chan, 2022, p. 28). Mithilfe der zahlreichen Kommentarfunktionen können sich die jungen Erwachsenen mit anderen Käufern verbinden und sich in ihrer Entscheidung für das Produkt selbst bestärken oder noch mehr von dem Kauf anregen lassen. Dies kann aber auch zu einem unkontrollierten Herden-Imitationsverhalten im Bereich des Impuls-Kaufens führen und ist aus ethischer Sicht zu vermeiden.

Einen wichtigen Anstieg zum Impuls-Kauf von z. B. einem Filmabo oder Musikabo hatte die Corona-Pandemie, weil die Menschen aufgrund der Lockdowns vermehrt Zeit online verbrachten und sich von Situationen und dem Ton der Influencer beeinflussen ließen (Abdullah & Artanti, 2021, p. 10). So führten der dringende Zeitfaktor, begrenzte Lagerware und relatable, sprich nachvollziehbare Beiträge von Influencern und Influencerinnen zu 31 % aller Impuls-Käufe junger Konsumenten und Konsumentinnen (Abdullah & Artanti, 2021, p. 10). Dass viele Menschen sich vermehrt dem impulsiven Konsum hingeben, kann jedoch aus ethischer Sicht negativ sein. Da auf Social Media auch vermehrt Personen von diesem Kaufvorgang Gebrauch machen, wird deutlich, dass Konsumenten und Konsumentinnen vermehrt an die Verantwortung der Marketer und Werbetreibenden denken und die Vorbildrolle der Influencer/innen auf ihren Kanälen im Impuls-Kauf-System neu bewerten.

Kleinere Influencer/innen können es schaffen, ihre Follower/innen in höherem Maße zur Interaktion zu motivieren und ein gewisses Vertrauen und eine Verbindung aufzubauen (Gross, 2020, p. 2). Somit beeinflussen sie das Kaufverhalten deutlich stärker. Da kleinere Accounts häufig auf ein Nischengebiet abzielen, ist die Zahl der User natürlich kleiner und somit die Möglichkeiten zur Durchsetzung der Werbebotschaft nicht so gegeben wie bei größeren Kanälen, die auch auf viele Nutzer/innen ausgerichtet sind.

Durch diese Mechanismen beeinflussen die Konsumenten und Konsumentinnen gegenseitig ihr Kaufverhalten auf Social Media.

5. Conclusion

The primary goal that was addressed by this scientific work was an analysis regarding the impact exerted by influencer marketing on the consumption habits of young adults residing in Germany. Through a carefully planned synthesis that included both present research and collected empirical data, the stated goal has been comprehensively met. The research question, with its focal point on how the employment of influencer marketing strategies molds digital purchasing behaviors within the studied demographic, provided the direction for an investigation into the core components of trust, authenticity, content quality, and the prevailing social dynamics observable within the German demographic. By ensuring that theoretical viewpoints were integrated alongside context-specific analyses, the mechanisms through which influencer marketing brings its influence to bear on consumers among young adults were given detailed insights, thereby achieving the study's articulated purpose.

A succinct summarization regarding the principal discoveries is deemed critical so that the most notable contributions made by this paper are given emphasis. It becomes clear that influencer marketing, noticeably when it is observable across such platforms as Instagram and YouTube, is instrumental regarding the determination of purchasing decisions for the young adult demographic within Germany. The source of the observed effectiveness in these campaigns is largely derived from both the credibility and the perceived authenticity that influencers embody, particularly influencers who cultivate smaller, more deeply engaged audiences—such as the identified micro- and nano-influencers—and it is seen that they consistently achieve higher performance when juxtaposed with more traditional celebrity endorsements. The building of trust and engagement is accomplished through the qualitative

aspects inherent in influencer marketing, which include transparent forms of communication, relatable forms of storytelling, in addition to validation derived from peers; it is these qualities which then draw a separation between the more typical commercial advertisements and strategies that are fundamentally driven by influencers. Further, the quality in content—exhibiting relevance, a keenness to visual appeal, and informativeness—has been seen to surface as a definitive element concerning consumer interaction, where empirical evidence displays a correlation that is direct between the level of influencer engagement that is achieved and resulting purchase behavior. Amplification of the effects created by influencer campaigns can be observed through social influence that is shown through electronic word-of-mouth, peer validation, and collective standards. Through this, both immediate purchases are encouraged together with brand loyalty that extends into the longer-term. In addition, the investigation has cast light upon the subtle function fulfilled by digital decision-making processes, where young German adults take on the task of employing critical inspection of endorsements, where influencer recommendations are validated with use of supplementary resources and networks among peers before any purchasing decisions are then made. Though considerable influence is achieved through these mechanisms, the moderating effects that come from wider societal considerations are also shown through the work. These include any skepticism regarding overt commercialism together with the attitude-behavior gap that is persistent in sustainable forms of consumption.

When these results are placed inside the wider research context, it can be seen that the significance and originality present within this contribution are demonstrated. There is alignment between what has been found and already established theories active in both social and consumer psychology; most notably the theories that address peer influence and persuasion, with a simultaneous highlighting concerning the singular characteristics present within the German digital environment. The prevailing discourse found in academics is not only confirmed but also extended regarding the shift away from marketing models that are driven by celebrities towards marketing models that are centered around community; and by achieving this, the paper enriches the present understanding concerning how digital marketing undergoes its evolution inside societies that are highly connected. The emphasis given to authenticity, trust, and engagement through participation serves not only to lend confirmation to the body of literature that is prevailing, but also works to introduce key perspectives that surround the limitations and scalability found in the present approaches. The German context, marked through elevated levels of digital literacy, skepticism coming from consumers, in addition to normative values undergoing shifts, offers itself as ground that is fertile so that both the complexities and the contradictions that are tightly woven into

contemporary influencer marketing can be examined. Due to this, the work renders both theoretical and practical perspectives, which are valuable assets for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners who seek to navigate through the shifting dynamics governing how digital consumer behavior operates.

Close attention is given through critical reflection on the results, so that notice is directed towards multiple limitations regarding both methodology and concept, as these deserve to be taken into consideration. Potential sample biases are brought in through exclusive dependence on secondary data taken from the existing literature, and generalizability regarding findings is subsequently constrained, especially when accounting for how rapidly the social media environments continue to change. Analytical precision and comparability face certain challenges as a result of the fluctuating definitions given to influencer categories and metrics addressing engagement as these appear across studies. Furthermore, the vulnerability of these dynamics towards erosion coming about through commercialization and algorithmic manipulation are given acknowledgement through the work even though the powerful influence coming from authenticity and effects from peers are able to be identified. In ethical forms of consumption, the gap that persists between attitude and behavior calls for an address directed towards structural barriers and market constraints that impede any translation of positive attitudes that could influence how actual consumer behavior occurs.

There are a host of opportunities that can be taken advantage of to perform further research that builds upon the understandings created inside this work. When considering future studies, there could be a benefit coming from employing primary empirical methods, such as qualitative interviews or surveys that extend across time, so that the shifting subtleties seen inside influencer marketing may be captured within the German context. The comprehension concerning how influencer strategies are able to be customized so that they fit diverse target groups can be enriched through further research which gives focus to particular demographic variables, such as gender, socioeconomic status, or differences that span across cultures. In addition, continuous investigation is prompted by the dynamic characteristics shown by social media platforms and digital formats that are just now coming into existence, so that the long-term implications that influencer marketing carries with it upon consumer behavior may be evaluated. Moreover, there is an expressed necessity so that ethical considerations are given a more profound exploration, most notably as these relate to transparency, the mitigation concerning undue social pressure, together with the prevention of advertising that is hidden inside campaigns driven by influencers. In addition to supporting any advancements to academic knowledge, these areas also lend support to the growth seen in more sustainable, ethical practices active in marketing.

When reflecting back on the research process, this work has facilitated a multifaceted appreciation with regard to the interdisciplinary characteristic exhibited by digital marketing, and also the intricate interplay connecting technology, psychology, in addition to the sociocultural considerations that mold consumption as it occurs in the present day. Both the opportunities and the challenges that paint the picture of influencer marketing as its landscape shifts at an increasingly rapid pace are highlighted through the understandings gleaned, arming the researcher through analytical and critical proficiencies that lend themselves to upcoming scholastic and professional endeavors. As a summation, the discoveries brought forth provide an understanding that is both nuanced and exhaustive concerning the influence that influencer marketing enacts among young adults within Germany, even while the foundation is set in place so that constant inquiry and innovation are made possible inside this field that is constantly seeing change.

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