

**Impacts of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Engagement**

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**Abstract**

Social media creates a competitive environment for marketers to stand out from their competition, so it is important to understand what cognitive processes drive consumer engagement. Little work has been done to understand the social media engagement behaviors of Generation Z. Therefore, the present research explores how Generation Z's consumer engagement on Instagram is impacted by the social media marketing strategies of influencer promotion versus brand promotion. In order to test which marketing strategy is most engaging, a mock Instagram feed was developed for participants to scroll through and interact with through liking, commenting, and sharing various posts. Influencers promoted Outdoor Voices, a generally unknown brand that sells male and female clothing that was chosen to avoid brand bias. Other brands' posts were chosen by looking through the recommended brands accounts generated by Outdoor Voices. After engaging the mock feed, participants (N=94) completed a survey measuring the cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement (Dessart et al., 2016) generated by the social media marketing posts. Results indicate that influencer marketing generates behavioral and cognitive engagement when pertaining to likes and time spent on a specific post. On the other hand, brand marketing generated cognitive engagement when pertaining to product recall and brand relatability. Furthermore, it was found that brands not promoted on the feed were generating engagement, such as Nike, thus shining light on the power of brand bias to generate engagement even when a brand is not being promoted. From a marketing perspective, this study emphasizes the effectiveness of brand promotion on social media rather than pure influencer promotion.

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### **Impacts of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Engagement**

In a March 2021 blog post for his social media marketing company Buffer, senior product marketing manager Mike Eckstein declared that “Without engagement, social media is just media” (par. 1). While everyone is likely familiar with social media, few may be aware of the role played by “engagement,” a term that began to gain popular traction in 2010, but was studied by academics as early as 2006 (Lim, 2022). Social media engagement can be classified as the interactions individuals have with online accounts and the content posted therein. Some examples of social media engagement include, liking, commenting, and sharing of material posted online by known affiliates, such as family members and friends, and unknown affiliates, such as companies and celebrities. Due to the ability of social media to generate so much engagement, marketers have started using a number of social media marketing strategies to promote brands.

Marketing entails communicating the value and functionality of a brand or product (Rucker, 2021). However, with social media, marketers are rewarded with the opportunity to spread their message to broader audiences and to connect with consumers more effectively than they could with print, television, or radio media. According to Jonathan Durante (2021), a Forbes accredited marketer and Chief Operating Officer for Expandify Marketing Inc., social media allows marketers to easily target specific consumer demographics, build audiences, and track return on investment. In addition, social media is starting to have a more significant impact on consumer buying decisions due to the increase in usage and dollars spent on marketing on different platforms. For instance, consumers are four times more likely to spend more on purchases if they are easily influenced by social media marketing (Barysevich,

2021). However, online users scroll through thousands of advertisements a day; how will they be “easily influenced” by social media marketing? According to the New York Times economics and media reporters Sydney Ember and Rachel Adams, respectively, brands that are featured in user-generated content on social media are able to effectively connect with consumers that would otherwise ignore advertising (2015). Meaning, consumers are more likely to be influenced by someone they trust and whom they voluntarily followed rather than an advertisement that is obviously using persuasion messaging and is paid and posted by the marketer.

Consumers are more likely to buy products promoted on social media by someone they feel they have a connection with (Garsd, 2019). And that connection will influence the behavior of individuals in one or both directions. Such a pattern is expected and has been since ancient biblical times. Indeed, Proverbs 27:17, which biblical scholars assert may have been written as early as the 10th century BC, states, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (NIV). This verse is traditionally interpreted to mean that people are most easily influenced by other people., and that is why marketers have been spending grand amounts of their marketing budgets on partnering with social media influencers that can reach large audiences much more effectively (Barysevich, 2021; Sanders et al., 2019).

Influencer marketing happens when marketers promote their brands through the endorsements of social media influencers (Corbitt, 2021). Because social media influencer marketing has become such an effective strategy, nine out of ten brands are using social media influencers (Corbitt, 2021). In addition, marketers find that consumers trust influencers because they feel as though they can relate to them on a

personal level. Further, anyone has the opportunity to be an influencer; therefore people view influencers as more authentic than traditional celebrities (Jin et al., 2019).

Authenticity in social media posts is very important to consumers, and consumers interact or engage with content that they deem as trustworthy (Suciu, 2022). Consumers of all demographics interact on social media. However, it is Generation Z, the newest consumer cohort, that has had access to digital technologies from a young age and are well-versed in all aspects of social media and steadily becoming significant part of the global market (Bewick, 2021). Being able to use social media influencers who can engage and relate to Gen Z consumers gives marketers an advantage. Overall, social media influencer marketing is an effective and authentic way to promote brands to consumers; however, not much is known about its impact on Gen Z.

### **Consumer Engagement**

Consumer engagement is a relatively new concept in marketing and has many distinct definitions (Dessart, 2016; Hollebeek 2011). However, most definitions and studies done on consumer engagement come from other social sciences, such as psychology and organizational behavior (Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011; Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2014). Therefore, consumer engagement has yet to be thoroughly conceptualized in the marketing field. Often in relation to marketing, consumer engagement is considered in the context of social media (Hollebeek., 2014). Mersey et al. (2010) explains that there are four main reasons people engage in the media: information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. Though necessary, defining engagement is a difficult task because of the various ways a brand can be integrated into someone's life. Mersey et al. (2010) defines engagement

as “the collective experiences that readers or viewers have with a media brand” (p. 40). An experience is a consumer’s specific set of beliefs about how a media brand is integrated into their lives. The term *engagement* is referring to the entire experience and the term *experience* refers to the consumer’s beliefs about a specific media (Mersey et al., 2010). Further, depending on the consumer’s wanted message, their experience with a brand will differ. For this reason, according to Mersey et al. (2010), engagement can be classified as the qualitative and holistic feeling of consumers. In comparison, Dessart et al. (2016), defines consumer engagement as “the state that reflects consumers’ individual dispositions toward engagement foci” (p. 11). The definition of consumer engagement provided by Dessart et al. (2016) focuses more on the psychology behind the engagement, explaining that it “is expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations that go beyond exchange situations” (p. 11). Similar to the definition provided by Mersey et al. (2010), Voorveld et al. (2018) defines consumer engagement as “a multilevel, multidimensional construct that emerges from the thoughts and feelings about one or more rich experiences involved in reaching a personal goal” (p. 29). The definitions of consumer engagement provided by Mersey et al. (2010) and Voorveld et al. (2018) focus on the experiences of a consumer, whereas that of Dessart et al. (2016) focuses on the psychology of consumers in the process of being engaged.

### ***Dimensions of Consumer Engagement***

In addition to defining, Dessart et al. (2016) explains the new dimensions of consumer engagement being: behavior, cognitive, and affective with multiple sub-dimensions. Dessart et al. (2016) explain that the behavior dimension includes the

behavioral drive to engage with a brand or product beyond purchase. Meanwhile, the cognitive dimension considers the consumer's enduring and active mental states when interacting with a brand. And finally, Dessart et al. (2016) outline the affective dimension, which takes into account the consumer's feelings toward an engagement focus. According to Dessart et al., the sub-dimensions of behavioral engagement (see Figure 1) include sharing and learning about a brand or product; the sub-dimensions of cognitive engagement are attention and absorption, or the amount of time spent pondering an engagement focus and the amount of information retained regarding a specific brand or product, respectively (Dessart et al., 2016). Finally, the sub-dimensions of affective engagement are enthusiasm and enjoyment, traits used to describe the level of emotion associated with a certain brand. The following table is a snapshot taken from Dessart et al. (2016) to summarize the dimensions and sub-dimensions of consumer engagement:

Figure 1. Dessart et al. (2016) Dimensions and Sub-dimensions of Consumer

Dimensions and sub-dimensions	References
<b>Affective:</b> Summative and enduring level of emotions experienced by a consumer	Brodie et al. (2011)
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Calder et al. (2013)
Intrinsic level of excitement and interest regarding the engagement partner	Hollebeek (2011a, 2011b)
<b>Enjoyment</b>	Mollen and Wilson (2010)
Pleasure and happiness derived from interactions with the engagement partner	Patterson et al. (2006)
<b>Behavioural:</b> Behavioural manifestations towards an engagement partner, beyond purchase, which results from motivational drivers	Brodie et al. (2011)
<b>Sharing</b>	Gummerus et al. (2012)
The act of providing content, information, experiences, ideas or other resources to the engagement partner	Hollebeek (2011a, 2011b)
<b>Learning</b>	Van Doorn et al. (2010)
The act of seeking content, information, experiences, ideas or other resources from the engagement partner	Verhoef et al. (2010)
<b>Endorsing</b>	
The act of sanctioning, showing support, referring resources shared by the engagement partner	
<b>Cognitive:</b> Set of enduring and active mental states that a consumer experiences	Brodie et al. (2013)
<b>Attention</b>	Brodie et al. (2011)
Cognitive availability and amount of time spent thinking about, and being attentive to, the engagement partner	Hollebeek (2011a, 2011b)
<b>Absorption</b>	Mollen and Wilson (2010)
Level of consumer's concentration and immersion with an engagement partner	Patterson et al. (2006)
	Vivek et al. (2012)

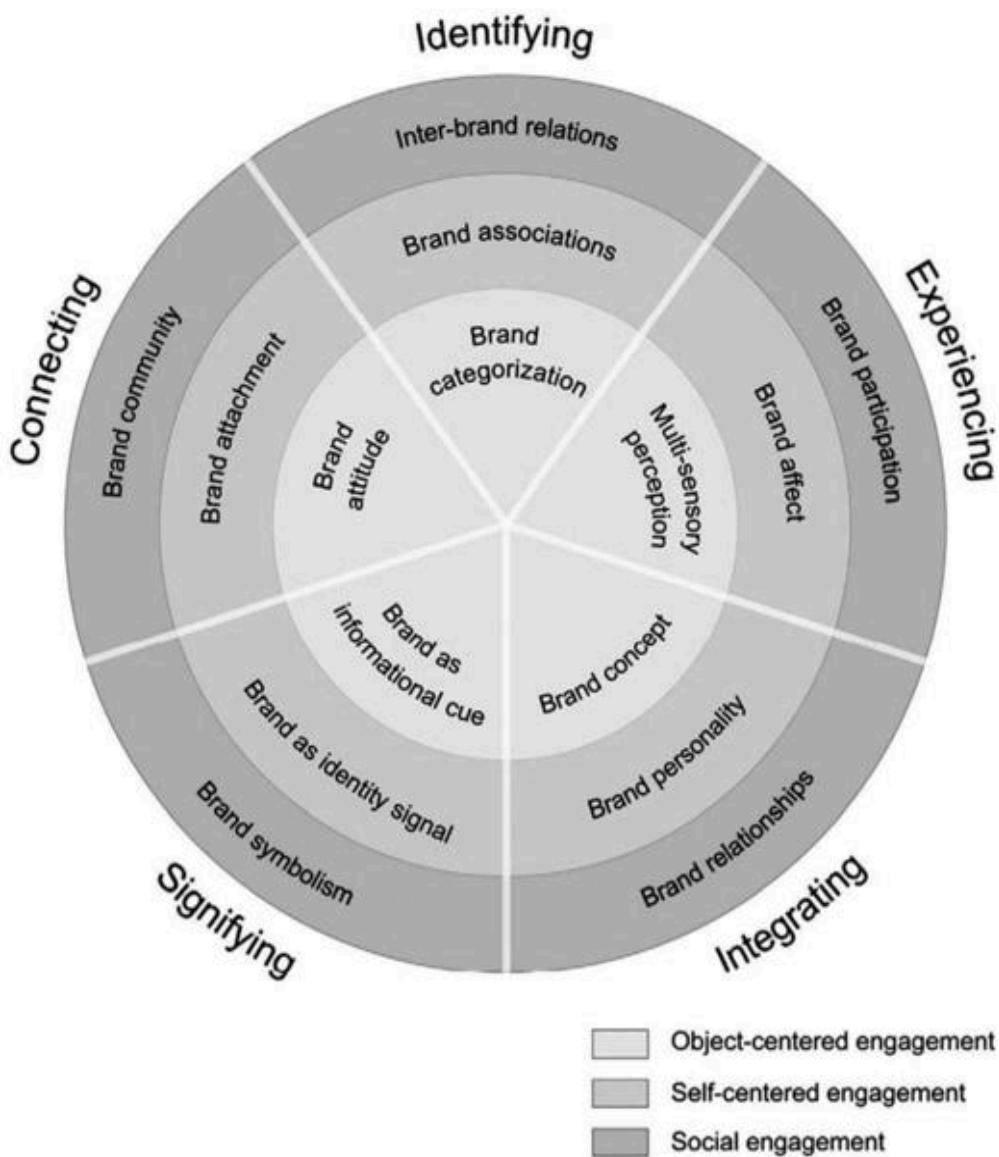
## Engagement

In addition to examining the different levels of engagement, it is important to understand the consumer psychology behind that engagement. With that endeavor in mind, Schmitt (2012) constructed a comprehensive framework to study important brand constructs aligned with the psychology of consumers. In his study, Schmitt argues that people convey information about a brand through multi-sensory stimulation, meaning through the use of various senses (Schmitt, 2012). Therefore, consumers experience certain characteristics of a brand and learn how to respond to the differing characteristics. According to Schmitt (2012), depending on a person's goals, needs, or motives, there are three different degrees, or levels, of consumer psychological engagement: *object-centered*, *self-centered*, and *social*. The first, *object-centered* engagement, is when a consumer seeks out information from a brand with the intention of gaining practical benefits from that specific brand. The main purpose of *object-centered* engagement is to connect a brand's logo to its product category. For example, consumers may begin noticing a brand's logo or pick up on audible slogans, meaning they are gathering "multi-sensory stimuli of a brand" (Schmitt, 2012). This sensory stimuli connects to memory, which will then lead to awareness and choice. The second level, *self-centered* engagement, happens when the brand is viewed as important in the consumer's life. Thus, *self-centered* engagement is how a consumer feels about a certain brand or what mood a brand invokes in the consumer. Finally, *social* engagement is when the brand gives the consumer a sense of community and "is viewed from an interpersonal and socio-cultural perspective" (Schmitt, 2012, p. 8). According to Schmitt, this means that "brands are social representations" (Moscovici & Markova, 1998; Schmitt, 2012). Consumers form relationships within brand

communities that “provide help and support, recommendations, and interaction with like-minded consumers” (Schmitt, 2012).

Along with the three levels of engagement, Schmitt (2012) found there are five brand-related cognitive processes: identifying, experiencing, integrating, signifying, and connecting. Each of the five processes are connected to all three levels of engagement (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Schmitt (2012) Model of Brands



When consumers are engaged in an *object-centered* way, they categorize brands, which is known as the identification of a brand. Therefore, the process of identifying can be associated with *object-centered* engagement when referring to the

identification and categorization of a brand. To elaborate, when a consumer classifies a brand and then makes connections to other brands through comparisons, relationships, and associations, they are using the process of identifying while being engaged in an *object-centered* way (Schmitt, 2012). Further, when consumers engage with brands in a *self-centered* way, they make associations and seek out brand information that is relevant to them and their lives. People form their personal associations with brands through information kept in their memory, which would again fall under the process of identifying. Finally, when consumers engage with brands in a *social* way, they form inter-brand relations to further understand a certain brand, and they will often compare brands to see which one stands out. For example, comparative advertisements are important because they create “greater consumer awareness or more positive associations” towards a brand allowing one specific brand to ultimately come out on top (Schmitt, 2012, p. 10).

The second brand-related process is “experiencing,” which is a consumer’s sensory image provided by the experience of the brand (Schmitt, 2012). Consumers engage with brands in an *object-centered* way by using one of the senses and associating it with an element in that brand such as the brand’s logo. Further, when consumers engage in a *self-centered* way, brands invoke different moods in consumers. The different emotions a brand enforces can portray different information about the brand. And, of course, some brands can even evoke a mixture of feelings. When a consumer is fully invested in the process of experiencing a brand, they are actively trying to retain information pertaining to that specific brand in a *social* way of engagement.

The third process, “integrating,” happens when consumers collect information about a certain brand and they create an “overall brand concept,” “personality,” and “relationship” with the brand (Schmitt, 2012, p. 6). Consumers create a brand concept when they are engaged in an *object-centered* way; they form a brand personality when they are engaged in a *self-centered* way; and consumers form a brand relationship when they are engaged in a *social* way. Schmitt (2012) defines brand concept as “a psychological construct consisting of the integrated information associated with a product brand or corporate brand” (p. 11), which means that. Meaning, consumers may view a brand as a “lifestyle” brand because of the information associated with that specific product. Furthermore, while consumers are engaged in a *self-relevant* way, they assign characteristics or personality traits to a brand to help them differentiate brands with similar qualities.

Aaker (1997) uses vodka as an example of a product category that utilizes brand promotion that urges consumers to assign attributes to because the product itself is otherwise “colorless” and “odorless” (Schmitt, 2012, p. 11). For example, some consumers may describe a certain vodka brand “as a cool, hip, contemporary 25-year old”; however, some vodka brands are described “as an intellectual, conservative, older man” (Aaker, 1997, p. 2). In addition, consumers not only attribute character traits to a brand, but consumer brand interactions may resemble a consumer’s personal and social relationships. That isMeaning, consumers tend to interact with brands that correlate to their relationships. For example, people can have “customer-brand relationships” that model best friends, marriages, flings, affairs, etc. Conclusively, all three levels of engagement in the process of integrating collaborate with each other. For

instance, brand relationships and personalities can coincide because if a brand is deemed as “existing” the relationship associated may be a “fling”. (Schmitt, 2012, p. 12).

The fourth process is *signifying*, which is when consumers begin to perceive brands as indicators that deliver a specific message (Schmitt, 2012). When a consumer is engaged in an *object-centered* way a brand signals an informal cue; when they are engaged in a *self-centered* way a brand signals a consumer’s identity; and when they are engaged in a *social* way a brand is signifying a culture or a group. Information gathered about a brand is used as an informal cues. For example, information such as price range can indicate the value of a certain brand (Schmitt, 2012). Further, brands help consumers form a personal identity, such that. Meaning, consumers purchase products from a brand because it helps them to express and understand themselves. Finally, when brands signify whole groups of people or cultures, consumers connect with them on a social level. For example, McDonald’s stands for a nation– it is a symbol of the U.S. culture. (Schmitt, 2012).

Finally, the fifth process is *connecting*, which is when a consumer connects with a brand through “brand attitude” (*object-centered*), “brand attachment” (*self-centered*), and “brand community” (*socio-cultural*) (Schmitt, 2012). Schmitt (2012) defines brand attitudes as “psychological tendencies to evaluate objects along a degree of favor or liking” (p. 13). Meaning when consumers are engaged in an *object-centered* way, they will develop an attitude based on information they have gathered on a brand. These attitudes can lead to small desires or directly to purchase intention. In addition, consumers connect to brands through brand attachment, which is similar to brand attitude; however it can lead to brand loyalty. When connecting to a brand, consumers

form brand communities so they can share their experiences and goals for a specific product. Schmitt (2012) explains that these five processes “are not necessarily one-directional and linear in the way that information processing is presented from encoding to choice” (p. #). In other words, Meaning, there is no specific order for which these processes can occur. Understanding the cognitive processes that drive consumer engagement is crucial because platforms upon which marketers can post content has grown exponentially and marketers need to stand out from their competitors.

One way that marketers can stand out is with engaging visuals. Manic (2015) points out that the use of visual content as a marketing strategy is better than using text and is becoming more prominent with the use of social media. When a brand is portrayed through a visual image, it “humanizes” the brand and allows consumers to relate to it. Visual advertisements are also proven to be more effective in influencing a consumer’s purchase decision (Manic, 2015). Visual information is processed much quicker than verbal writing, which is important for marketers to know, because “human perception is mostly visual. Over 90% of the daily processed information comes from visual receptors” (Manic, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, people’s attention spans have been decreasing rapidly over the past few years. Therefore, using visual content versus text can catch a consumer’s attention more effectively, hence the increased use of digital media to advertise brands (Manic, 2015).

## **Generation Z**

One demographic and consumer group that has been exposed to digital media—thus digital advertisements—the greatest portion of their lives is Generation Z (henceforth Gen Z), the age cohort born between 1997-2012 (Dimmock, 2019). Gen Z

follows the Millennial generation (born between 1981-1996) and is succeeded by Generation Alpha (early 2010s-mid-2020s). Generation Z has had exposure to Internet technology and online interaction since birth and are significantly growing as a consumer group (Thangavel et al., 2019). Thangavel et al. (2019) explain that a *generation* is an identifiable sect of people who share common birth years, experience similar life events, and grow up in a comparable environment with equal resources, opportunities, and challenges" (p. 2). Compared to other generations, Gen Z has overwhelming knowledge and access to information because of technology and the Internet. According to Thangavel et al. (2019), as consumers, Gen Z is unique because of the following characteristics: they depend on family and friends for purchasing decisions; they are less loyal to brands; and they are more attuned to the political, cultural, and socioeconomic changes in their environment. Spears et al. (2015) explains that Gen Z "display shared characteristics, including being technologically savvy and consuming information through digital media" (p. 28). According to Kaihatu (2020), 40% of global consumers in 2020 consist of Generation Z, thus making it essential for markets to understand this generation of consumers. Further, this digitally-driven generation is exposed to online marketing more than any other generation (Kaihatu, 2020).

To find marketing strategies most effective to Generation Z, Spears et al. (2015) conducted a study on university students to find new effective marketing strategies for learning communities (LC). The researchers identified six different strategies that worked on the students: face-to-face interaction with students, maximizing campus partnerships to increase face-to-face interactions, maximizing campus partnerships to

increase the scope of digital outreach, using digital platforms to share LC information, hiring student help, and adapting through assessment. However, out of the six, Spears et al. (2015) found that using digital media as well as face-to- face interactions are the most effective marketing strategies for marketing learning communities to Generation Z. Face-to-face interactions are effective because Generation Z is strongly influenced by in-person communication, which is ironic due to the amount of online communication they participate in (Spears et al., 2015). Overall, Spears et al. emphasized that marketing to Generation Z poses a different challenge because technology is always changing, thus making the ways to reach Gen Z always changing.

McCoy et al. (2021) found that Generation Z's purchase intention is largely driven by factors such as attitude, fashion leadership, and subject norms. Subject norms are the “belief that an important person or group of people will approve and support a particular behavior, which drives an individual's behavioral intention and actual behavior” (McCoy et al., p 3, 2021). To elaborate, subject norms are ultimately the social pressure created by certain groups of people compelling others to behave in a certain way.

Like McCoy et al. (2021), Kaihatu (2020) studied Gen Z's purchase intention, but did so by examining the influence of digital media marketing on consumer engagement and purchase intention in Generation Z. Purchase intention is “shaped by trust, good perception of content, valence, price and quality, and online social networking” (Kaihatu, 2020, p. 61). In particular, Kaihatu (2020) studied Gen Z in Indonesia, as Gen Z makes up 29.23% of the Indonesian population. Kaihatu (2020) chose 30 respondents with experience in online shopping, then a variety of frameworks were used to measure how

digital marketing affects consumer engagement and purchase intention. The study found that digital marketing toward Gen Z has a positive impact on consumer engagement (Kaihatu, 2020). Kaihatu explains that consumer engagement drives purchase intention, thereby making engagement in online media crucial for the marketing of a brand. Furthermore, purchase intention is affected by the marketing content produced, such as photos or the use of a specific celebrity endorsement. Because of GenZ's experience with technology, they make quick decisions regarding online purchases; however, they are non-impulsive buyers and are looking for the best deal (Kaihatu, 2020). In addition, because Gen Z is less loyal to brands than generations past, brand engagement is more difficult to achieve (Kaihatu, 2020). Overall, Generation Z is fast-becoming more important and impactful as consumers, they are very technologically savvy, and marketers need to find the best ways to keep them engaged in brands through social media marketing (McCoy et. al, 2021).

### **Marketing and Social Media**

Over a decade ago, marketers started to realize the potential of social media advertising, and instead of spending thousands of dollars on print or broadcast advertising, they focused on building a relationship with their consumers through social media (Wright et. al 2010). Social media marketing is a company's way of promoting a brand or product on a social networking site. Traditional media such as magazines, television, and radio are thus becoming outdated to consumers (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Regardless of the medium, it is important to note that marketers are essentially trying to communicate a brand's values to a customer (Wright et. al 2010). However, getting a message across on social media has posed a different challenge

because it is much more difficult for marketers to try and stand out amidst the competition. After all, people who regularly use social media see thousands of advertisements a day, so they make an effort to avoid online advertising (Wright et al., 2010). Nevertheless, social media manages to expose users to countless modes of marketing, and platforms permit marketers enough information about the users to understand consumers and create customer-brand relationships (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021).

Research shows there are five main factors that play into social media marketing activities: “entertainment, customization, interaction, trendiness, and word of mouth” (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021, p. 2). Marketers use these social media marketing activities to strengthen things such as purchase intention, engagement, and customer-brand relationship. For example, social media allows for businesses to reach a broader audience so that consumers can choose from products and services from around the world (Vinerean et. al., 2013). Further, social media allows consumers to easily interact with each other and share their opinions and different experiences with a brand. This form of communication among consumers has formed a new type of consumer socialization that impacts consumer’s decisions. According to Vinerean et al. (2013), consumer socialization anticipates that the communication between consumers has an impact on “their cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes” (p. 66). Understanding consumer attitudes and behaviors is crucial for marketing success. Vinerean et al. (2013) conducted a study to find out what type of social media do users like and if there is a positive outlook on advertising on networking sites. Vinerean et al. (2013) collected data through an online survey targeting the students at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu

in Romania. The survey was made to study the students' behavior and reactions to social media websites to better understand interactions in an online environment. The analysis classified social media consumers into four new groups: "*Engagers, Expresses and Informs, Networkers, Watchers and Listeners*" . According to Vinerean et al, *Expressers and Informs* can be classified as people who are focused on themselves in the social media world. For example, they upload information regarding themselves through platforms such as Twitter. People who are classified as *Engagers* are those who often read reviews or comment and post about their opinions. On the other hand, *Networkers* actively engage in their friends' posts by commenting and sharing. Finally, the study found that the fourth classification of social media consumers, *Watchers* and *Listeners*, only utilize social media when there is something appealing or entertaining for them, such as watching movies or listening to music. These four new categories create a base for psychographic segmentation established by the different activities people participate in on various online platforms (Vinerean et. al., 2013). In other words, these categories serve as a new way for researchers to group social media consumers based on psychological characteristics. Being able to classify consumers is extremely important for marketers to understand how social media has given consumers more power to influence others.

Due to social media, consumers are beginning to shape the way brands communicate rather than the marketing managers. According to Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016), there are two types of communication: one controlled by the company, and another that is independent from direct corporate control. This phenomenon is addressed in Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) with structural equation

modeling to observe the effects that firm-created and user-generated content have on brand equity, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) chose three product categories to study the influence of brand communication on consumer responses. The categories consisted of non-alcoholic beverages, clothing, and mobile network operators. Each category was given to a respondent and they had to respond by indicating the brand they “liked” on Facebook. After they chose, the respondents began receiving information on the brand they chose and other users who “liked” the same page. Then every seven days for four weeks a questionnaire was posted on different brand fan pages informing respondents about the study and asking them to fill out a few questions.

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) found that firm-created content does not directly influence consumers' perceptions on brand equity. However, it does affect the consumers' attitudes towards brands. For example, firm-created content can create a viral response that can help spread advertising to a larger public encouraging consumers to generate brand content. Further, the study found that firm-created content on social media does not compete with user-generated content; rather, firm-created content increases a consumer's attitude and brand awareness so that consumers can then create their own content to support a brand (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Similarly, Goh et al.'s (2013) study examines the impacts of user-generated content and marketer-generated content in a social media environment and how it affects consumer purchase behaviors. The large increase in social media use has created a great amount of “user-generated content,” thereby attracting marketers' attention. In order to engage with consumers on social media even more effectively,

marketers also generate content called “marketer-generated content.” According to Goh et al. (2013), consumer purchase decisions are influenced by both user- and marketer-generated content. For example, social media allows one-on-one interactions between buyers and advertisers through commenting, posting, and responding (Goh et al. 2013). Goh et al.’s (2013) study is a content analysis conducted by examining a business fan page brand on Facebook, for a casual wear apparel retailer in Asia. The researchers monitored the interactions between the user-generated content and marketer-generated content through likes and comments. They observed two different types of content: direct, posts that can be addressed to someone or the entire community, and indirect, comments to posts. The study found that consumer purchases increase with the increase of engagement in the social media brand community. Therefore, consumer purchase behavior is influenced by brand community content (Goh et al., 2013). In addition, evidence showed that direct and indirect communication matters differently for user-generated content and marketer-generated content. For example, indirect content is important when driving purchase, whereas direct content is effective when trying to persuade the consumer about a brand. Researchers found that engagement in social media through consumer identification, communication, and participation in a brand community positively affects brand awareness and purchase behavior.

Now that social media has emerged, it has opened the door to millions of possibilities for marketing (Wright et al., 2020). Before marketers can reach their target market, they must create a relevant and memorable message for the audience. Social Media allows them to do so and to build a relationship with their consumers so they can

respond to customers needs and goals. Social media allows for two way communication, which is crucial when it comes to understanding consumer wants and needs. In addition, marketers can easily cater to these needs due to the two way communication on social media and they can answer questions and help consumers directly. Marketing and social media is overall about creating value for everyone (Wright et al., 2020).

### **Social Media Marketing Strategies**

Having already analyzed the relationship between marketing and social media, and how that relationship creates value for both marketers and consumers in the sections above, this section will examine some of the specific strategies employed by marketers on social media platforms. With 82% of the world's population using social media, marketing strategies need to be aligned with the needs of users in order to be effective (Zhu & Chen, 2015). Users generally spend time on social media to connect with people, whereas marketers are using social media to sell products. Zhu & Chen (2015) say that social media marketing efforts can be improved through congruence of user need satisfaction, meaning to align the consumer's needs with the marketing goal. For example, people engage on social media for many reasons, such as connecting with family and friends, having a creative outlet, entertainment, etc. (Zhu & Chen, 2015). In other words, consumers will not engage with messages that have no perceived value for them.

In order to provide users engaging experiences, brands need to be able to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Visually appealing images are something that can help marketers capture a consumer's attention, as audiences are

often drawn to them. Zhu and Chen (2015) explain that more than 65% of people are visual learners, meaning that the majority of people remember things based on what they see, not on what they read or hear. Luckily, social media platforms allow for creative expression and give marketers the opportunity to use design and aesthetics to capture consumers' attention. "Beauty creates desire" and "smart social media marketing channels people's desire into revenue" (Zhu and Chen, 2015, p 343). However, a number of studies found that people are not interested in unsolicited content even if it is appealing to the eye. So, to cause engagement, marketers must not only catch consumers' attention but also cater to their needs (Zhu & Chen, 2015). Once engaged, users post and share their experiences with a brand, creating an electronic word of mouth, which then stimulates brand awareness (Zhu & Chen, 2015).

In another study of social media marketing strategies, Vernuccio (2014) analyzed new ways to communicate corporate brands through social media. To study corporate branding, which Vernuccio (2014) describes as the voice and image a corporation presents to various audiences, she conducted a quantitative empirical study on the communication initiatives of major international corporations to find the top corporate branding strategies. The study found that corporate branding marketers use social media to adopt conversational forms of communication in order to involve stakeholders in the conversation. The traditional model for building a brand is focused on customers being passive recipients of messages; but once again, social media gives marketers a new way for corporate branding, which includes interacting with stakeholders. By marketing corporate brand promotion on social media, a new strategy emerges based

on interactivity and openness, which allows customers to be included in the conversation. Vernuccio (2015, p. #) states:

Social media may be considered a new social and economical landscape, with constantly shifting boundaries within which users are able to enhance their own control of every stage in the brand communication process.

Due to social media, consumers also have the ability to voice their opinions about brands to large groups of people like never before. This has led to a new marketing strategy brands have started taking advantage of: social media influencers (Vrontis et al., 2021).

**Social Media Influencers and Influencer Marketing.** Social media creates an environment where the user is both a consumer and brand promoter. Vrontis et al. (2021) classifies influencer marketing as when a brand or company gives an influencer free products or pays them to promote their brand. Users who are able to obtain many followers from their content are ultimately classified as social media influencers. Influencers are known as third party endorsers that can change people's views on particular products or brands as well as build a relationship with them (Arora et al., 2019). In the highly competitive social media landscape brands often have problems generating content on social media that is highly engaging to consumers. However, influencers are specialists in creating interactive and engaging content (Campbell & Farrell., 2020).

Campbell and Farrell (2020) explains that there are many different ways to classify influencers by, engagement rates and focus area; however, within these classifications are five groups or categories of influencer, as determined by number of

individuals who subscribe or follow their social media accounts: nano influencer, micro influencer, macro influencer, mega influencer, and celebrity influencer. Similarly, Isyanto et al. (2020) classifies influencers into related categories, however the researchers specify the amount of followers each group has (e.g., micro influencers: followers ranging from 1,000 to <100,000). Further, costs for influencer marketing campaigns are drastically rising billions of dollars each year, being 6.5 billion in 2019 and around 9.7 billion in 2020 (Bentley et al., 2021).

In addition, social media influencers have become an important new marketing strategy because they have creative freedom, but also have perceived credibility and authenticity (Krywalski et al., 2020). Social media allows for any ordinary person to become an influencer just by content creation. In addition, influencers are able to reach a global audience on a completely different scale.

Consumers are now able to actively participate and engage with brands. Therefore, electric word of mouth (eWOM) has become another important strategy (Krywalski et al., 2020). It is essentially the spreading of opinions and ideas. Social media influencers are powerful because they specialize in certain fields giving them knowledge and influence. However, what makes an influencer popular is the “use, presence, and activity” on social media. Social media influencer profiles are considered to be more effective than traditional celebrities (Krywalski et al., 2020). This makes influencers an essential part of marketing. Social media influencer marketing is described as the selection and recognition of an influencer for product endorsement on SM. Influencers are able to integrate a brand's message into their daily lives and experiences, thereby engaging their followers and creating a relationship with both the

consumer and brand. Overall, influencer marketing is extremely important because through the content influencers create they are able to integrate the product into their personal experiences.

In addition, Booth and Matic(2011) examine how corporate brands on social media are beginning to be shaped by influencers. They explain that social media permits everyone a voice to express opinions and bring people with similar interests together. For corporate brands, this is great if they can get consumers on social media to make their brand an “interest” to engage with and promote. To study this phenomenon, Booth and Matic (2011) used a customizable valuation algorithm to rate social media influencers that create brand awareness. The study found that “integrating the influencer index data into a holistic social media strategy provides a comprehensive social media approach for optimizing brand equity” (Booth & Matic, 2011). They discuss that what makes social media influencers so influential is that they not only have direct friends and followers, but they are relevant to extended or indirect connections. Further, influencers are becoming the new brand ambassadors and storytellers for certain brands, thus allowing them to control the brand’s equity and the levels of engagement that a brand receives on social media.

Now that social media influencers have become an integral part of marketing, it is important for marketers to determine which influencers are best for certain products (Arora et al., 2019). Research shows that “engagement, outreach, sentiment, and growth” are all key factors in choosing influencers (Arora et al.,2019, p 86). In addition, there is a constant competition between marketers to differentiate their promotions on social media and reach larger audiences. It’s essential that brands choose the correct

influencer to market their product because it increases the influence on consumers. Influence can be described as “the ability to drive action and receive people’s engagement on a post” (Arora et al., p 87, 2019). Overall, influencer marketing is used to keep consumers engaged and to build a customer brand relationship (Arora et al., 2019).

In order to build a relationship, users must follow a specific influencer. According to Vrontis et al. (2021), users generally follow influencers because they have similar interests or values, so users tend to trust their opinions over just regular advertisements or celebrity endorsements. In fact, studies have shown that at least 50% of social media users follow a form of social media influencer and trust in their opinions (Vrontis et al., 2021). When given the opportunity to promote a certain brand, social media influencers end up playing a part in the co-creation of the brand’s image. In addition, brands rarely manage to engage consumers on social media by themselves, so influencer marketing is an extremely favorable strategy. However, whether an influencer’s sponsorship is disclosed or not, a post has an effect on the way consumers perceive the message. Luckily, when sponsorship is disclosed it causes intentional engagement. Unfortunately, sponsorship disclosure increases consumer skepticism and lowers influencer credibility.

To study consumer skepticism and influencer credibility, Kim et al. (2021) studied users’ attitudes using applied persuasion knowledge theory, the idea that the more “people are suspicious of presumed intent of advertising to manipulate them, the more negatively they respond” (p. #). Three studies were conducted to explore the central relationships of an influencer’s endorsements, the impact of commercials being endorsed, and corporate reputation. Study 1 found that when a commercial was

introduced by an influencer, positive attitudes towards corporate reputations increased via reduced persuasion knowledge. However, study 2 found that influencers are not invincible because sponsorship disclosure led to a decrease in positive message attitudes, increased persuasion knowledge, and less favorable corporate reputation. Finally, study 3 found that the way the influencer delivers their message can cause a positive response to corporate commercials only if sponsorship is not disclosed. Indeed, “marketers report that influencer marketing is many times more effective than commercials” (Kim et al, 2021). This is the case because of influencers' authenticity and ability to connect with their audience in a personal way. However, with so many different types of influencers it is important for marketers to note which endorsers prove to be most effective.

Companies will hire traditional celebrities and Instagram celebrities for different purposes, as they have specific personalities that allow them to easily spread messages on products and start new trends to drive sales. In particular, popular Instagram influencers can be classified as Instagram celebrities or Instafamous because Instagram is a very suitable platform for promoting beauty products, certain lifestyles, and luxury brands in an eye-catching way. Recently, deploying the Instafamous for branding is an important part of social media marketing. When implementing influencers as a social media marketing strategy, marketers found that influencers are an even more effective strategy than celebrity endorsers. Jin et al. (2019) conducted a study comparing two different types of social media endorsers in order to test this theory. The researchers examined how consumers reacted to posts with the same product endorsed by an Instagram celebrity and a traditional celebrity (Jin et al., 2019).. Jin et

al. (2019) put 104 females in a two-group comparison between subject design experiment to compare reactions to celebrity endorser Eva Longoria and Instagram celebrity fashion blogger Olivia Palermo. The researchers chose separate images of the two celebrities that were relatively similar in pose, fashion style, and product (Jin et al., 2019). Researchers found that traditional celebrity endorsement is a reliable strategy; however, Instagram celebrity endorsement is more effective when reaching out to consumers who prefer to engage with brands on social media. With influencers, they can especially target consumers with different levels of appearance related self-discrepancy. In addition, the ability to become famous on Instagram without being part of a professional entertainment industry or record label is making people consider trying to become self-made celebrities (Jin et al., 2019). Further, adolescents and young adults are enticed by the perks of being an influencer. With such a great following and promotions from brands, being an influencer has become a career choice. Further, the implementation of influencer marketing is possible due to the vast number of social media platforms. But none is more influential in 2022 than Instagram.

### **Instagram**

According to Vrontis et al. (2011) and Krywalski et al. (2020), when it comes to influencer marketing Instagram is an extremely popular and crucial platform because of the “instantaneousness of the content” (p. 623; p. 43). In addition, Instagram is especially effective for social media marketing because it allows for the production of audio-visual content as well as the opportunity to tag brands in posts (Krywalski et al., 2020). According to Jaakonmäki et al. (2017), Instagram has more than 400 million users and is continuing to grow. More recently, Ibrahim and Aljarah (2021), found that Instagram

has surpassed a billion users. The amount of people on Instagram allows users to reach large audiences by producing engaging content. For example, Instagram users focus on portraying themselves in a certain way to gain followers, so they will generally post positive images that lead to positive perceptions essentially creating positive feedback from their followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Further, people are more likely to mimic the actions of a celebrity that receives positive feedback (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Therefore, when an influencer or celebrity promotes a product on their “positive” feed, consumers will make an association with that brand and the influencer, thus creating a trusting customer-brand relationship (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Instagram fosters customer-brand relationships because of how easy it is to communicate within the app. In addition, the production of content on Instagram generates engagement that marketers are starting to take advantage of. In relation, Jaakonmäki et al. (2017), conducted a study exploring different textual and visual content features of Instagram posts to measure their effectiveness on user engagement. The features explored in the study were factors such as the use of social media influencers and social media marketing that incorporate word-of-mouth strategies in reaching consumers. Further, content features such as text, visual, and audio were explored to measure consumer engagement from different posts. Using quantitative content analysis, in which all of the creator and context related features were collected and analyzed to identify the most engaging elements of a post, Jaakonmäki et al. analyzed collected data and conducted a regression analysis. They found that factors such as time and location are crucial in determining the level of engagement and amount of interaction with a certain post. In addition, the following elements were found

to affect social media user engagement: type of influencer (age, gender, etc.), time/day of post, and the type of feelings invoked by the post (created by color, emojis, scenery). Engagement is one of the most important factors to measure the success of a marketing campaign because it measures things such as clicks, likes, and shares, which all ultimately create online word of mouth (Bentley et al., 2021).

### **Further Research**

Consumer engagement was found to be defined in many ways when pertaining to marketing. Specifically, Mersey et al. (2010) and Voorveld et al. (2018)'s definitions of consumer engagement focus on the experiences of a consumer, whereas Dessert et al. (2016)'s definition focused on the psychology of consumers while being engaged. While both types of definitions are important to consumer engagement, the phycology behind engagement is crucial to understanding consumer behavior on social media so that marketers can stand out from the competition. The consumer demographic who is extremely well versed in social media usage is Generation Z. With social media becoming more popular, marketers are able to connect with users such as those in Generation Z and build a relationship with them to promote brands and products. Furthermore, social media creates an environment where the user is both a consumer and brand promoter, so people who are able to gain a lot of followers have the power to influence those followers ultimately making them influencers. In addition, brands use social media influencers to promote their products on to of their own brand promotions to connect with the consumers ultimately making social media a great new marketing strategy. After examining the psychology behind consumer engagement and discovering the importance of social media for marketing through the use of influencers

and corporate brand promotions, it is important to find which social media marketing strategies are most engaging to consumers. Specifically, social media influencers were found to be extremely effective, and Instagram is a popular social media platform when it comes to influencer marketing. In addition, Gen Z is the newest cohort that has been exposed to technology since birth which makes them crucial to understand as consumers. Therefore, after the extensive literature review, on consumer engagement and social media marketing strategies the following question remains: **How does social media influencer marketing impact consumer engagement among Generation Z on Instagram?**

### **Method**

The purpose of this study was to discover which social media marketing strategy was most engaging to consumers. A mock Instagram feed was created for participants to scroll through as well as a survey to take after scrolling to measure the participants cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels of consumer engagement (Dessart et al., 2016).

### **Participants**

The intended sample size was to gather at least 50 participants. Luckily, the achieved sample size was 94 allowing for a wider range of responses to analyze. The goal for obtaining participants was to obtain a large sample size of different types of consumers with different interests. There were no limitations on race, sex, economic status, ethnic group etc. The only limitation or requirement for participants was age. Participants were to be in Generation Z and above the age of 13. Of all the participants

72 were female and 22 of were male. The majority of participants were from the following high schools: Houston Christian, St. John XXII, Katy Taylor, and St. Agnes. There was a variety of races in the study, however the majority were caucasian.

### **Sampling**

The study's instructions and survey were posted on social media, sent out by email to the Houston Christian Highschool student body, and administered by text to friends who then also sent out the study. There were no specific sampling methods used because the survey was administered out for anyone in highschool to complete with no incentives given out to make people take the survey. The study and survey was open for participants to complete on January 12, 2023 and the study closed on January 27, 2023.

### **Research Design**

In order to test which social media marketing strategy is most engaging to consumers a mock instagram feed and survey was created for consumers of Gen Z who use Instagram.

### ***Materials and Procedure***

In order to expose participants to corporate and influencer advertising on social media a mock instagram feed was created for respondents to scroll through as if it were their own feed where they could like, comment, and share the posts. The account username was @dspstudy and each respondent was asked to follow account and scroll through every post and respond by liking, commenting, and sharing the posts they would normally interact with on their everyday feed. There were 22 pictures chosen for the feed which consisted of 6 micro influencer posts, 8 corporate brand posts, and 8

filler posts. The brand that the influencers were promoting was chosen to be Outdoor Voices because this is a brand that sells both women and mens clothing, it has a social media account and uses influencers, and it is known but not so famous that it would cause brand bias. Each of the influencers were chosen because they had promoted Outdoor Voices on their feed and their post was exactly replicated on the @dspstudy account. The corporate brand posts were chosen by looking through the recommended accounts that came up from the Outdoor Voices brand account. A mix of clothing, food, cosmetic, and home brands were chosen to give the participants a variety of advertisements to scroll past or interact with. The brand chosen were as follows: Party Pants USA, Rumpl, The Sill, Health-Ade, Modern Citizen, Suoergoop, and Hoka. Finally, the filler posts were a mix of funny memes, relatable reels, and little miss posts. No personal or friend pictures were added to the feed to prevent bias towards the engagement. All posts were taken from real Instagram account and replicated exactly on @dspstudy to create the most accurate Instagram experience for participants.

Once the Instagram account was finished, a survey was created using Google Forms in order to measure the engagement levels each post generated. The survey consisted of 5 sections being: Demographics, Behavior Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, Affective Engagement, and Influencer Promotion. The levels of engagement were chosen based on Dessert et al.'s definition of consumer engagement being, "the state that reflects consumers' individual dispositions toward engagement foci" (2016). Dessert et al. (2016) explains that engagement "is expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations that go beyond exchange situations". The demographic section asked respondents for their gender,

race, and age. The behavioral engagement section asked questions regarding their likes, comments, and shares of each post and whether or not they would seek out more information about a brand. The cognitive engagement section asked questions regarding product recall and time spent on each post. The affective engagement section asked questions regarding emotions elicited by the brands, traits associated with the brands, and activities connected to the brands. Finally, the influencer promotion section asked questions about whether or not the respondents as consumers follow and have bought products from influencers or will in the future. The participants were told that to scroll through the feed and complete the survey all together should only take about 5 minutes. Once all data was collected from the study data analysis was done by using the generated response graphs from Google Sheets.

## Results

The aim of this study was to deepen the understanding of consumer engagement in generation Z on Instagram. The definition of consumer engagement provided by Dessart et al. (2016) was used to divide the study into three parts being the affective, cognitive, and behavioral levels of engagement. In order to asses the levels of consumer engagement, a mock instagram feed was developed followed by questionnaire using quantitative analysis software. The collection and analysis of the data from the questionnaire was done by using Google Forms.

## Demographics

The questionnaire “Consumer Engagement” was administered to respondents over a three week period where 94 people completed the study and its questionnaire.

Of the 94 participants, 76.6% of the respondents were female and 23.4% of the respondents were male. Of the respondents, the majority with 62.8% were caucasian, 12.8% were hispanic, 10.6% were asian, 4.3% were african american, 5.3% were middle eastern, and the other 1.1% being of mixed raced. Considering the study focused on generation Z, the age range of respondents was between 13 and 20, however no one under the age of 14 completed the study. Of the 94 respondents, 7.4% were 14 years old, 9.6% were 15 years old, 8.5% were 16 years old, 45.7% were 17 years old, 25.5% were 18 years old, and only 3.2% of respondents were over the age of 18.

## **Behavioral Engagement**

After the series of demographic questions, a series of questions were asked to measure the behavioral engagement of the respondents after scrolling through the Instagram feed. The first question was “Did you like any of the posts on the Instagram feed?” Out of the 94 respondents, 93.6% indicated that they did like posts and 6.4% said they did not (**Figure 2.1**). Out of the 93.6% of respondents that said they liked a post, 68.1% said they liked the funny/meme posts, 60.6% said they liked the influencers, 56.4% said they liked the Tok Toks, 28.7% said they liked the brand ads, 16% said they liked something other than what was listed, 11.7% said they liked the drink posts, and 8.5% of people said they don’t remember (**Figure 2.2**). In the next question regarding behavioral engagement, respondents were asked “Did you share any of the posts on the Instagram feed?” Of the respondents, 71.3% said no and 28.7% said yes (**Figure 2.3**). When specifically asked which posts they shared, 24.7% shared the funny/meme posts, 11.8% shared the Tik Toks, and 2.2% shared the brand ads,

influencer, and other posts the other 72% indicated they didn't share any posts, which is in line with the data from Figure 2.3 (**Figure 2.4**). Within many of the posts were hidden brand promotions to measure consumer engagement. The next question was "Are you interested to learn more about the brands on the feed?" Of the 94 respondents, 69.1% said they were not interested in learning more, and 30.9% said they were interested in learning more (**Figure 2.5**). Of the 30.9% interested in the brands promoted, 10.6% said they were interested in Hoka, 9.6% said they were interested in Nike and Supergoop, 7.4% indicated that they were interested in Outdoor Voices, 5.4% said they were interested in Health-Ade and Party Pants USA, and 1.1% said they were interested in The Sill and Rumpl (**Figure 2.6**). The last question used to measure behavioral engagement was "After scrolling through the feed, were you interested in purchasing any products promoted?" Out of all the respondents 61.7% said no and 38.3% said yes (**Figure 2.7**). The brands with the products people were interested in were Supergoop with 12.9% of respondents expressing interest, Hoka with 10.8%, Nike with 6.5%, Outdoor Voices with 5.4%, Modern Citizen and Health-Ade with 4.3%, Party Pants USA with 3.2%, and The Sill with 1.1% (**Figure 2.8**). Out of all of the questions in the behavioral engagement section, regarding likes, shares, and interest the highest percent of brand responses and the percent of responses for the influencer brand where compared to fine the statistically significant results.

Did you like any of the posts on the Instagram feed?

94 responses

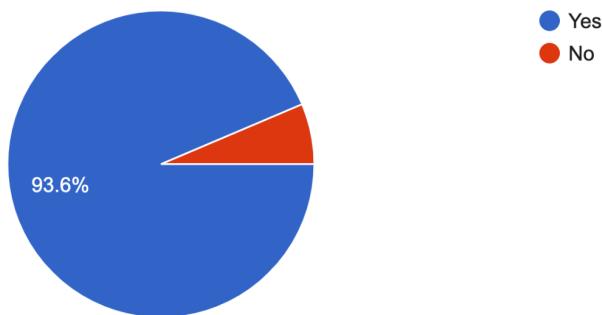


Figure 2.1: Liked Posts

Please indicate which posts you liked:

94 responses

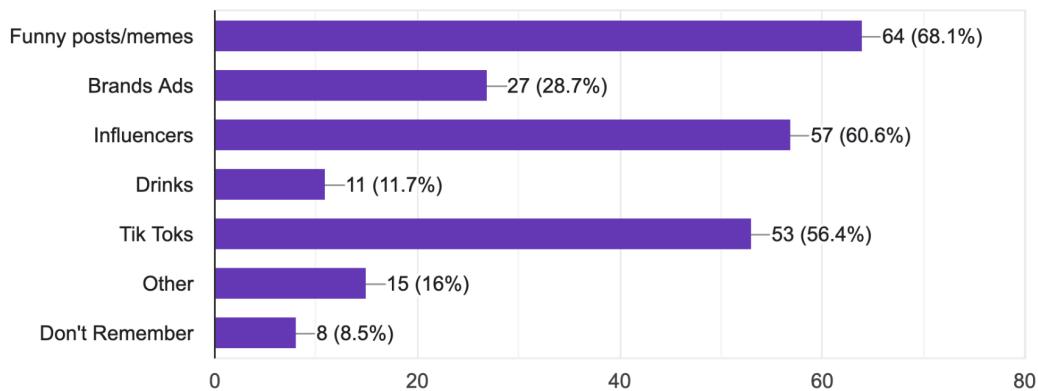


Figure 2.2: Indication of Liked Posts

Did you share any of the posts on the Instagram feed?

94 responses

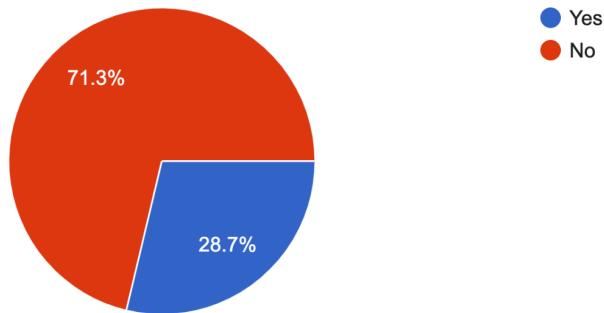


Figure 2.3: Shared Posts

What posts did you share?

93 responses

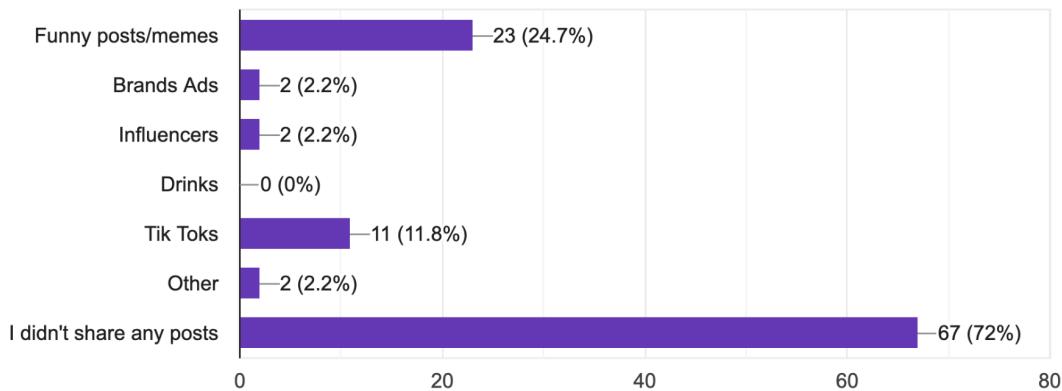


Figure 2.4: Indication of Shared Posts

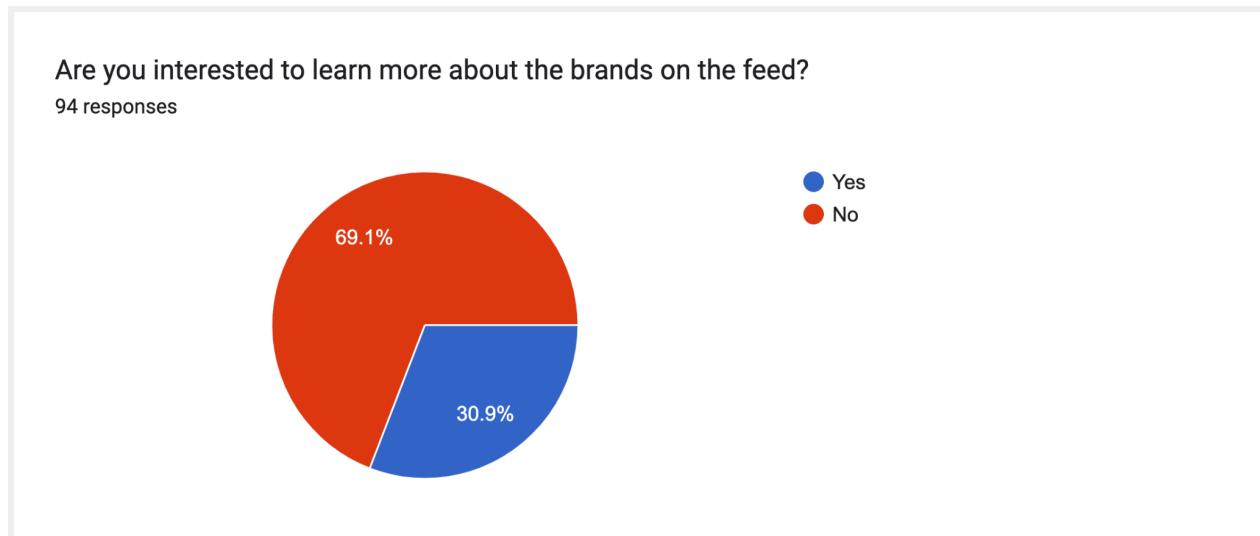


Figure 2.5: Brand Interest

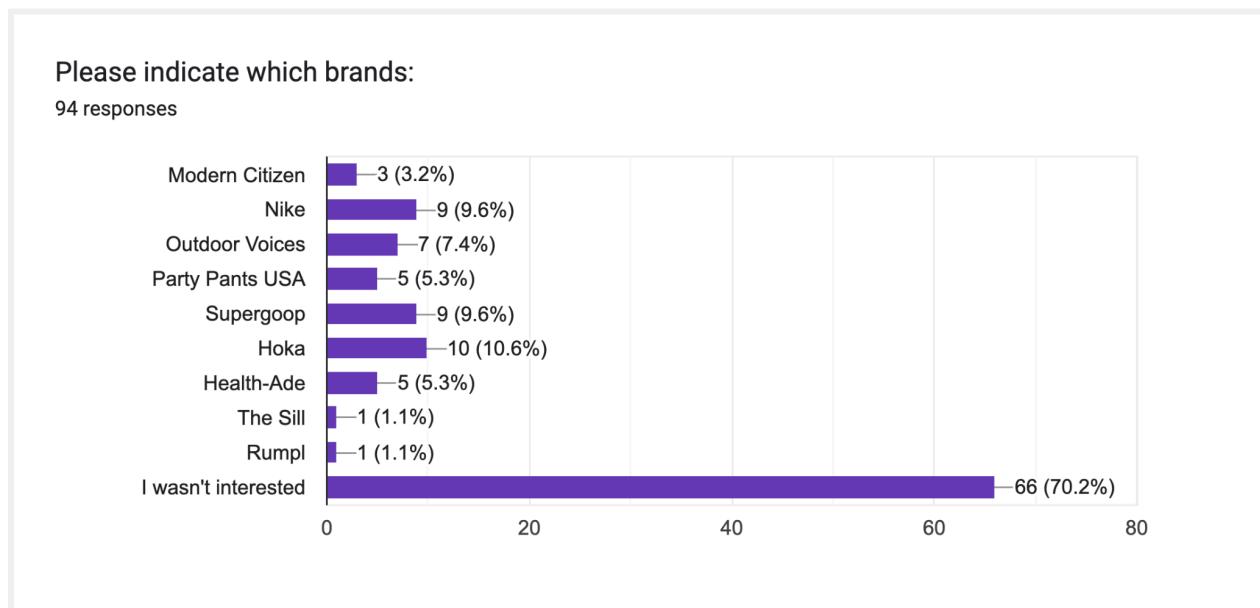


Figure 2.6: Indication of Brand Interest

After scrolling through the feed, were you interested in purchasing any products promoted?  
94 responses

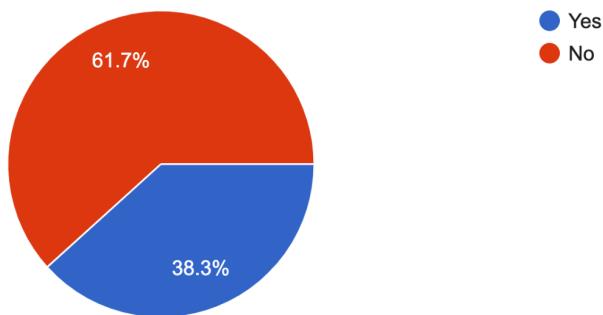


Figure 2.7: Indication of Brand Interest

Please indicate which brands had those products:

93 responses

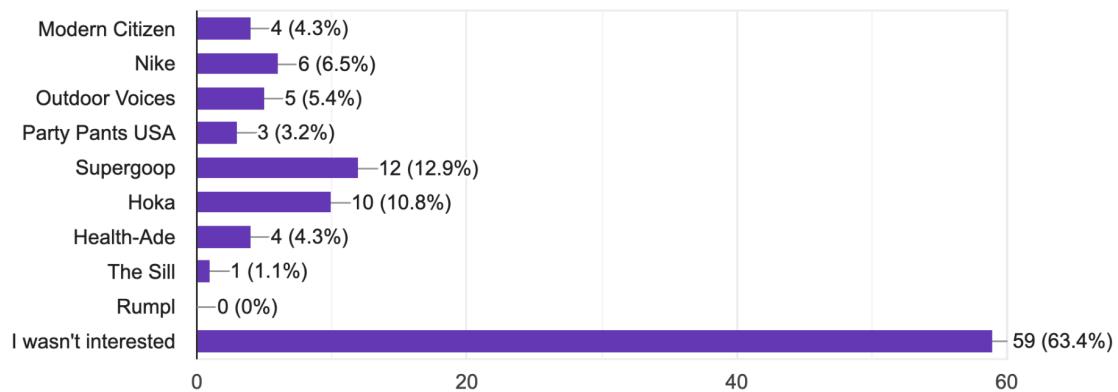


Figure 2.8: Indication of Brand Interest

## Cognitive Engagement

In addition to measuring the behavioral level of consumer engagement, questions were asked to analyze the cognitive levels of consumer engagement. The first question asked was “What posts do you think you spent the most time on?” Of the responses 53.2% spent the most time on the funny/meme posts, 43.6% spent the most time on the influencer posts, 38.3% spent the most time on Tik Toks, 10.6% spent the most time on brand ads, 7.4% of people did not remember, 4.3% of people said something other than the options listed, and 1.1% of respondents said they spent the most time on the drink posts (**Figure 3.1**). The next question regarding cognitive engagement was “Do you recall any of the brands posted on the Instagram feed?” Of the participants, 60.6% said they do recall brands promoted on the feed and 39.4% said they did not recall any brands on the Instagram feed (**Figure 3.2**). Of the 60.6% that said they recalled brands, 41.5% said they recalled Hoka, 20.2% recalled Party Pants USA, 17% recalled Outdoor Voices, 13.8% recalled Nike and Supergoop, 12.8% recalled Health-Ade, 7.4% recalled Rumpl, 5.3% recalled modern Citizen, and 1.1% recalled The Sill (**Figure 3.3**). The last question regarding cognitive engagement asked if the respondents could recall any of the brands promoted by the influencers. Of the participants, 53.3% of people said they could not while 45.7% said they could (**Figure 3.4**). When asked to indicate which brands, 27.7% of the respondents said Nike, 24.5% said Hoka, 11.7% said Supergoop, 6.4% said Outdoor Voices, 4.3% said Health-Ade, 3.2% said modern Citizen, and 1.1% said Party Pants USA (**Figure 3.5**). While 53.3% of people said they could not recognize the brands, when asked to identify the specific brands the percent jumped to 56.4% of people to not recognize any brands (**Figure**

3.5). Out of all of the questions in the cognitive engagement section, regarding time, recall, and recognition the highest percent of brand responses and the percent of responses for the influencer brand where compared to fine the statistically significant results.

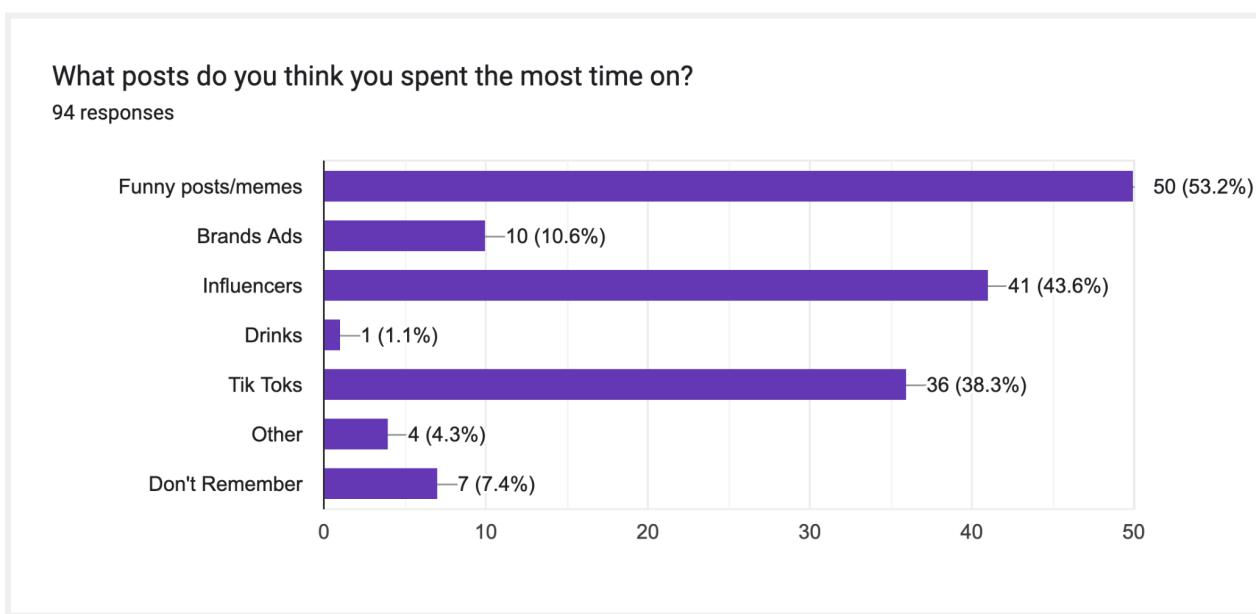


Figure 3.1: Time Spent on Posts

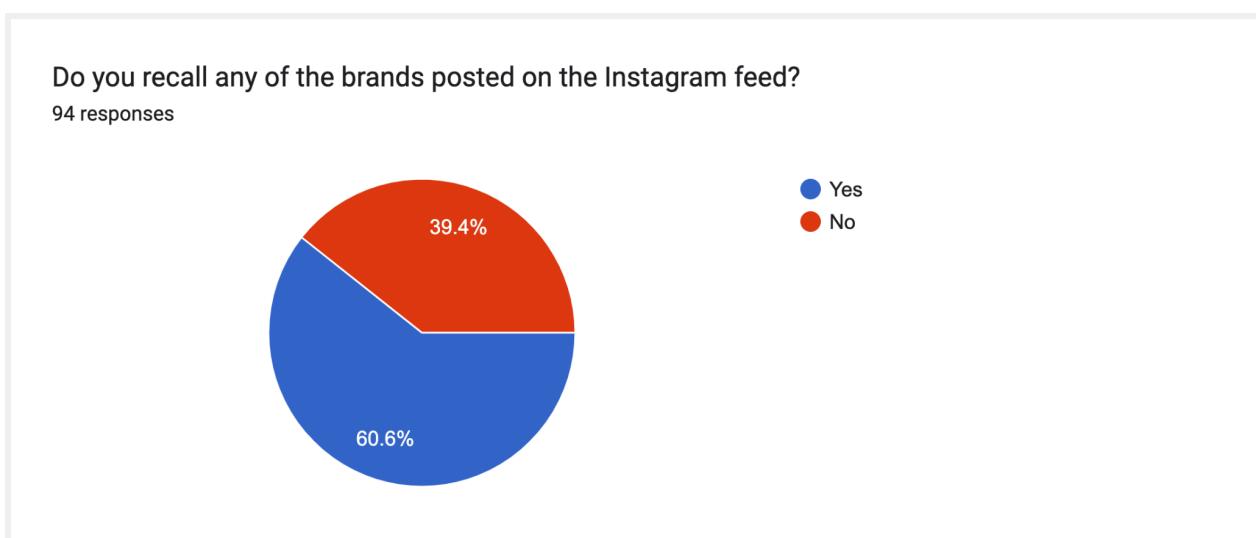


Figure 3.2: Brand Recall

Please indicate which brands you may recall:

94 responses

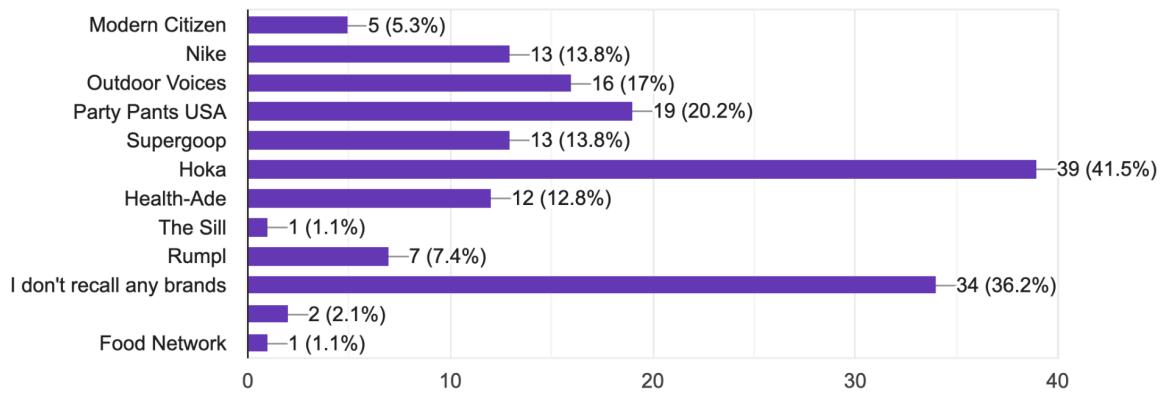


Figure 3.3: Specific Brand Recall

Did you recognize any of the brands they were promoting?

94 responses

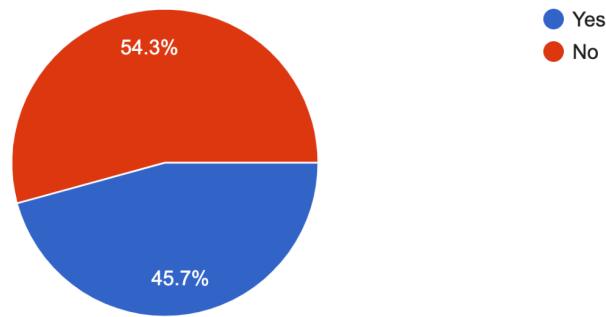


Figure 3.4: Brand Promotion

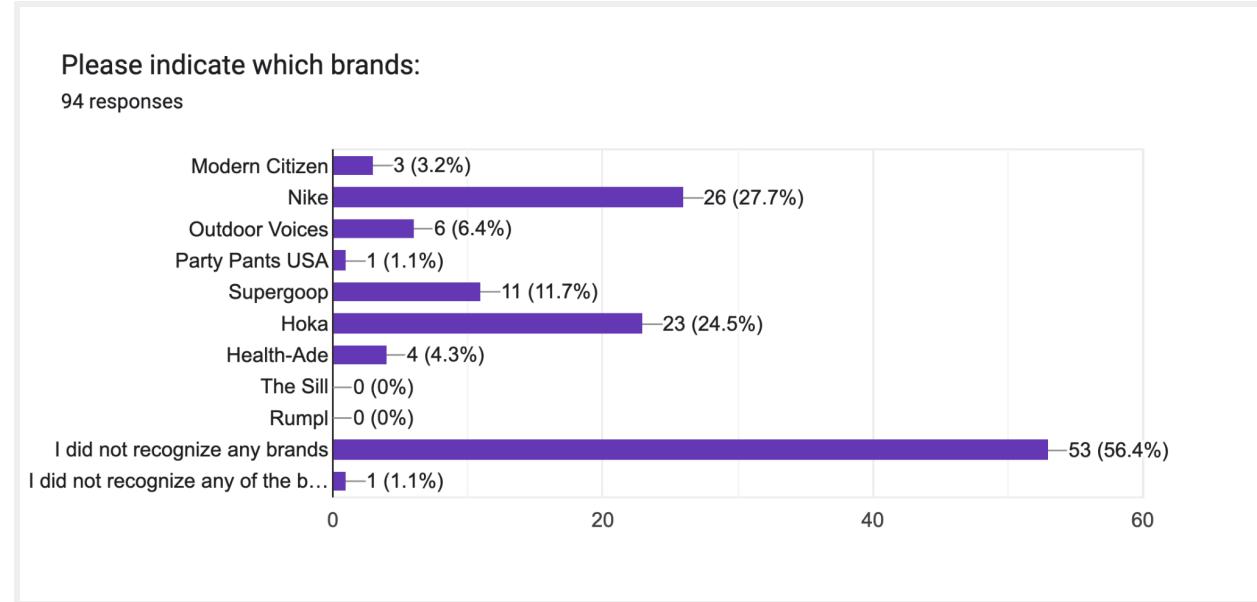


Figure 3.5: Recognition of Brand Promotion

## Affective Engagement

The last level of consumer engagement measured in the survey was affective engagement. The only question used to measure affective engagement was “Did you personally relate to any posts promoting the different brands?” Out of 94 respondents, 80.9% of participants said they did not personally relate to any brands, while 19.1% of participants said they did relate to brands (**Figure 4.1**). When asked to indicate which brands, 11.7% said Hoka, 6.4% said Outdoor Voices, 5.3% said Nike, 3.2% said Supergoop, 2.1% said Modern Citizen and Party Pants USA, and 1.1% said The Sill and Health-Ade (**Figure 4.2**). After indicating which brands they related to, the respondents were asked to choose in what ways they related to the posts. Of the respondents that related to a post, 22.3% said because it had “familiar activities to your activities”, 17% said because it was “similar post to posts on your feed”, 16% said

because of the “style of person promoting”, 13.8% said because of the post’s “use of favorite colors”, 12.8% said that it was an “overall relatable post”, 11.7% said because they were a “similar age to person promoting”, 9.6% said it was because of the “attractiveness of the person promoting”, and 2.1% said they were “not sure” (**Figure 4.3**). Out of all of the questions in the affective engagement section, regarding brand relatability the highest percent of brand responses and the percent of responses for the influencer brand where compared to fine the statistically significant results.

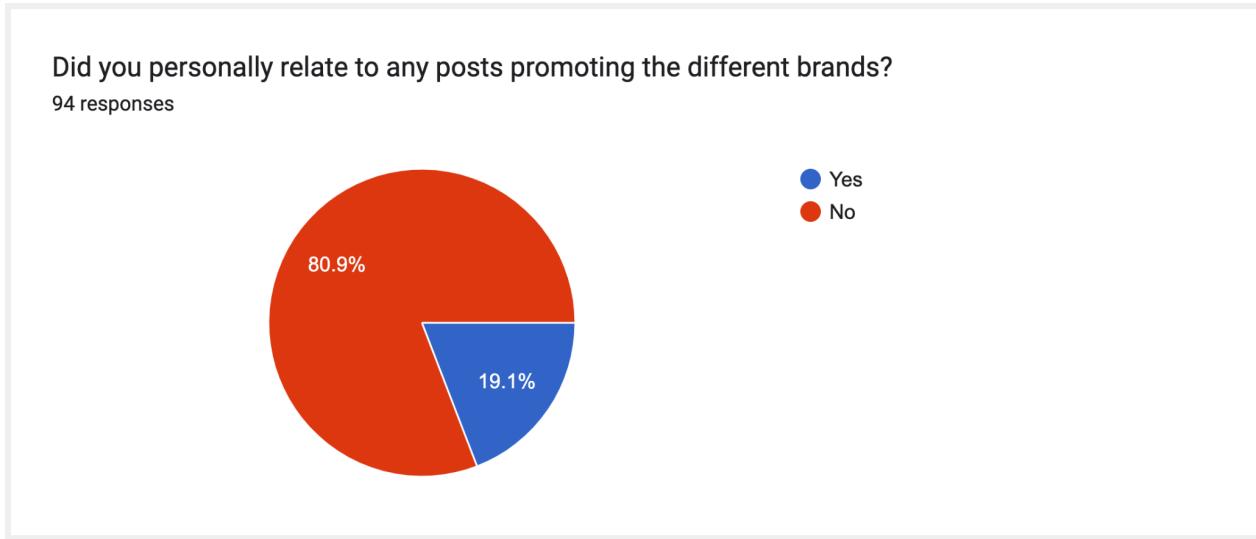


Figure 4.1: Brand Relationship

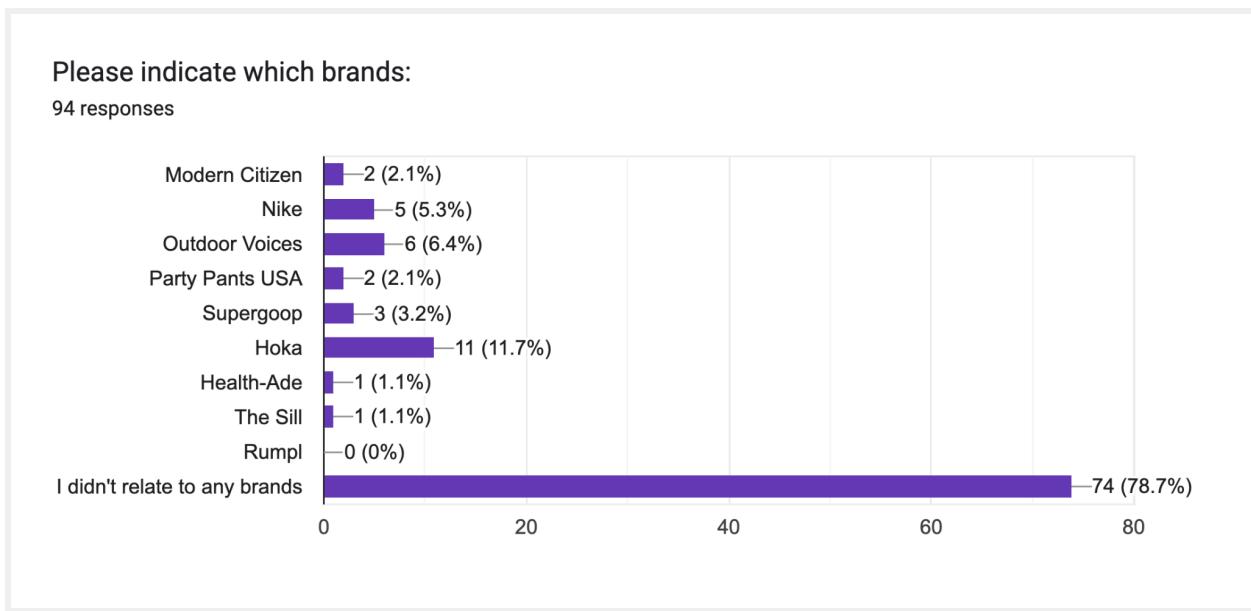


Figure 4.2: Specific Brand Relationships

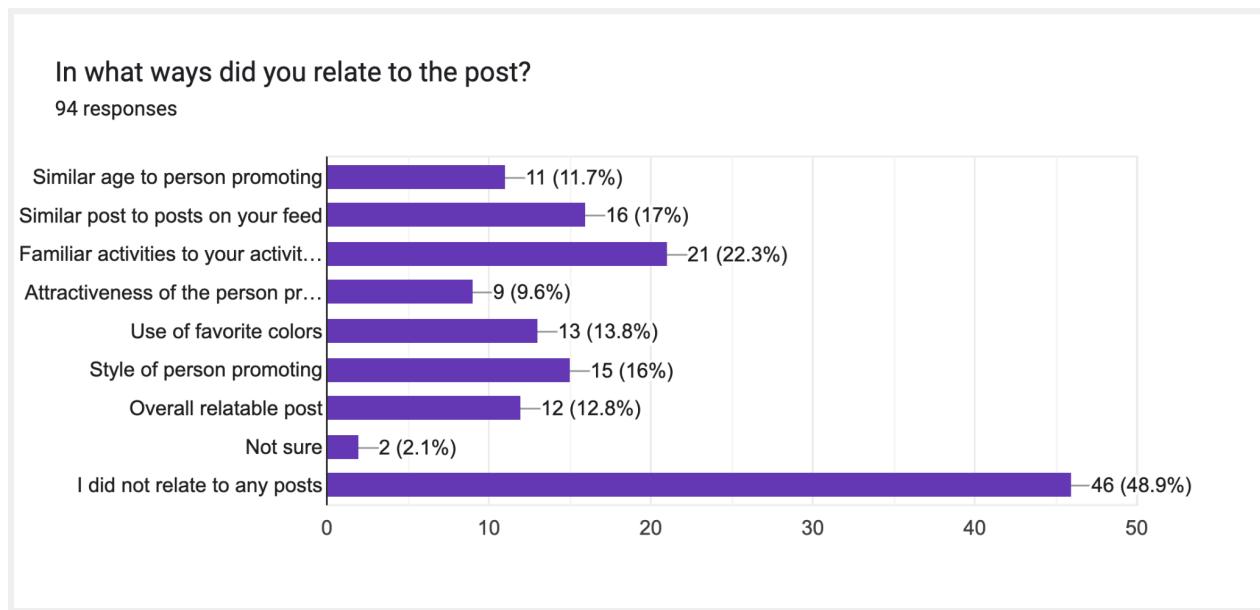


Figure 4.3: Personal Post Relationship

### **Comparison of Brands and Influencers**

In order to test the statistical significance of the results in the behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement sections, a two proportion z test was used comparing the highest percent of brand engagement and the highest percent of influencer engagement per each question. If the p value generated by the test was greater than 0.05, the test was statistically insignificant. When it came to behavioral engagement, the four questions asked in this section regarded likes, shares, interest to learn abd interest to purchase. The influencers generated the most engagement when it came to likes and the p value when comparing both types of engagement was 0.00001, making these results statistically significant. On the other hand, when it came to comments and interest in a brand the results were statistically insignificant ( $p= 0.5, 0.223, 0.088$ ). In the cognitive engagement section, the questions used to measure engagement was time spent, product recall, and brand recognition. The influencers generated the most engagement when it came to time spent on a certain post and p value when comparing the influencer and brand posts was 0.00001 making the results statistically significant. On the other hand, the brands generated the most cognitive engagement when it came to brand recall and brand recognition as compared to the influencers ( $p= 0.0001, p=0.0003$ ). Finally, when it came to affective engagement brand relatability when comparing influencers and brands had a p value of 0.10204, making this result insignificant. Overall, when considering the results that were found to be statistically significant, brands generate cognitive engagement (brand relatability and brand recall) and influencers generate behavioral and cognitive engagement (likes and time spent).

## Discussion

Advertisements are everywhere and even if you don't notice them marketing surrounds us. Because of the constant overload of information, it is getting more difficult for marketers to catch consumers attention as well as keep them engaged (Khan, 2021). However, a person who you can relate to that posts interesting content is sure to catch your eye. Influencer marketing is allowing brands to organically connect with consumers creating a more authentic relationship. Influencers easily engage users by posting relatable content. Studies show that those exposed to influencer's promotional content versus regular advertisements were more likely to buy products from influencer content (Khan, 2021). In addition, influencer marketing significantly effects the way users perceive certain products making them more susceptible to a purchase. Further, "over 3.6 billion people are using internet facilities" that is about 50% of the population (Khan, 2021). Researchers have found that the spread of opinions through electronic word of mouth on social media impacts purchase behavior more than regular advertising. Social media not only allows for brands to create their brand image but also allows brands to promote themselves through influencers. Past marketing strategies focus on gaining the attention of many different groups of people, however social media influencer marketing focuses on a specific target audience (Khan, 2021). There are many different marketing strategies used on social media to engage consumers, however with influencers becoming a prominent marketing tool, which strategy is most engaging to consumers?

The present research examines social media marketing strategies and their effect on consumer engagement. Specifically this study aimed to answer the question:

How does social media influencer marketing impact Generation Z's consumer engagement on Instagram? I hypothesized that influencer marketing would invoke the highest level of engagement among Generation Z on Instagram. In order to answer this question and test this hypothesis, influencer marketing and brand promotional posts were compared on Instagram to measure the level of consumer engagement generated by each marketing strategy. In order to measure the cognitive, behavioral, and affective levels of engagement generated by each strategy, a mock Instagram feed was created for participants to scroll through and interact with. Once finished scrolling, participants were given a survey to measure their engagement levels when interacting with the posts. The levels of engagement were determined by using Dessart et al. (2016)'s engagement domains being behavioral, cognitive, and affective. Similarly, researcher Kaihatu (2020) defines brand engagement as a consumer's level of cognitive, emotional, and or behavioral interaction with a brand" (p. 62). Kaihatu (2020) explains that engagement is formed by regularly coming into contact with brand content that is being interacted with by other consumers in the digital space. For example, the more content consumers see that is being liked and shared, the higher chance of an increase in engagement. Furthermore, the more content produced, the higher the engagement rises. In addition, Kaihatu (2020) found Generation Z will be more likely to engage with a brand through digital media after experiencing it and developing knowledge and emotion on that brand. Therefore, in order to further the research on Generation Z the present study focuses on Generation Z's consumer engagement.

After analyzing the results of the research and comparing the engagement generated by influencers and brands, it can be concluded that both influencers and

brands generate different types of engagement. Specifically, this study found that influencer marketing generates behavioral and cognitive engagement when it comes to liking a post and spending time on a post. On the other hand, brand promotional posts generated cognitive engagement in regards to product recall and brand recognition. Furthermore, this study found that brands not promoted on the Instagram feed generated engagement opening the door to further research on brand bias and brand recall.

### **Limitations**

This study had four main limitations, being: the fact that everyone's feed fits their own personal interest, participants having no relationships to the influencers chosen, limited sample size/demographics, and brand bias. Each limitation has to do with the way the mock Instagram feed was constructed.

#### ***Personalized Instagram Feed***

First, the greatest one of my limitations was not being able to construct personalized Instagram feeds for each one of my participants. In order to create the most efficient distribution process and collect as many participants as possible, only one feed was created with many general posts in attempt to cater to as many people as possible. However, in a realistic social media setting, everyone's feed caters to their personal interests due to algorithms that machine learns as a user scrolls (T.K et al., 2021). Essentially, machine learning allows "the systems...to learn itself without being programmed from outside" (T.K et al., p 3. 2021). Meaning that as people scroll through Instagram or social media, the machine programmed through algorithms gathers information on the things you like to see and constructs your own personal feed that

way. In addition, social media algorithms give people advertisements that cater to their own interests, meaning that everyone's exposure to social media marketing looks different. While the constructed Instagram feed in this study had a variety of brand advertisements to cater to many participants, there was no way to guarantee that everyone's interests were accounted for.

### ***Influencer Relationships***

The greatest tool that influencer marketing has over other marketing strategies, is an influencers ability to build a relationship with their followers and consumers. When the Instagram feed was created, influencers were chosen based off of those who have promoted the brand Outdoor Voices, and in attempt to prevent influencer and brand bias nano (<1,000–10,000 followers) and micro (<10,000–100,000 followers) influencers were chosen, meaning that influencers that were not very well known and likely didn't have a relationship with any of my participants were chosen. Therefore, regardless of the void relationship between the participants and the chosen influencers, this study was able to truly test the difference in engagement between influencer marketing and brand advertising, without the presence of influencer bias created by largely followed and favored influencers.

### ***Sample Size and Demographics***

My goal for sample size was about 50 participants, and luckily I was able to get 94 participants. However, some of the results were statistically insignificant, which was highly due to the small sample size that did not allow for a great differentiation in answers for each question. In addition, the demographics were a great limitation that stemmed from the small sample size, time to distribute, and participants available. The

majority of my participants were female (n=72) and caucasian (n=22) because the study was distributed to mostly students who attend private christian high school.

### ***Brand Bias***

The final limitation of my study was the presence of brand bias as a result of certain brands chosen for the feed as well as brands not promoted on the feed. The brands promoted on the feed were chosen through the brand accounts recommended to me from the Outdoor Voices Instagram account. In order to avoid brand bias, I chose brands that I deemed to be “not well known”. However this was obviously done out of personal opinions, rather than further research. While most brands chosen did not cause brand bias, Hoka was one well known brand in particular that was promoted on the feed and generated many responses in the question regarding brand familiarity opening the door to possible brand bias. In addition, in the survey response questions I added the brand Nike as an answer to see if a brand not promoted on the feed generated engagement, ultimately finding that brand bias was present. However, while Nike generating responses could have been due to brand bias, research shows that some possible factors that affect this type of brand recall are: brand logo bias and visual brand attention.

### ***Brand Logo Bias***

As seen in the results, when the participants were asked to indicate which brands they are interested in, recall, and recognize, every answer had a % of people that said Nike, however Nike was not a brand promoted in the Instagram feed. While I though this was due to brand bias a possible reason for this result is actually brand logo bias. According to Murawski et al. (2012), brand logo bias is subconscious. Murawski et al.

(2012), found that when making decisions humans are susceptible to accidentally picking up on contextual information. Meaning that when participants chose Nike as a brand they are interested to learn more about, they were associating the image of Hoka (a shoe) and using this contextual information to link their interest to Nike. In addition, Murawski et al. (2012) explains that “the brain incorporates seemingly unrelated value information that modifies decision making outside the decision-maker's awareness”. Therefore, it can be inferred that in a social media setting where people are mindlessly scrolling, the participants were not likely aware of the specific advertisements present causing a higher chance picking up on contextual information, ultimately creating brand logo bias.

### **Visual Brand Attention**

Specifically, in the results when it came to brand recall, Nike generated 13.8% (n=13) of responses, and when it came to brand recognition, Nike generated 27.7% (n=26) of responses. A possible reason for Nike generating this significant amount of responses even though it was not a brand promoted in the feed can be associated with visual brand attention. In a study done by Chandon (2002), on the attention and memory of brands to the point of purchase, Chandon found that “brand recall is overwhelmingly driven by brand familiarity and only to a limited extent by whether the brand was actually looked at or not during the choice task” (p. 3). Therefore, although Nike was not promoted on the feed and thus not paid attention to, Nike’s prominence as a brand itself caused brand recall because of Nike’s global familiarity.

### **Influencers and Media Metrics**

The present study found that influencer marketing generated more behavioral engagement in terms of likes rather than shares. However, there was no way to determine the driving force behind the likes having a statistically significant difference in engagement over that of the shares.

In a study done by Kunal Swani & Lauren Labrecque (2020) on the difference between likes, comments and shares in relation to social media engagement choices, the researchers found that there is a distinct difference between likes and shares. The researchers explain that the two basic processes that prompt engagement choices are “self-presentation and brand relationship connections” (Swani & Labrecque, 2020). These two intrinsic motivations for engaging were found to impact consumers’ determination to interact with brands. Overall, the study found that “likes and reactions are primarily driven by brand relationship connections and shares are primarily driven by self-presentation” (Swani & Labrecque, 2020). Therefore, it can be inferred that in the present study, influencers generated the most behavioral engagement in terms of likes because according to Swani & Labrecque (2020) likes are driven by the relationship a consumer has with a brand and influencers help to foster consumer brand relationships (Arora et al., 2019). On the other hand, in the present study the influencers and brands generated the same amount of engagement and a very small amount of engagement as well. When considering the fact that shares are driven by self presentation, it can be inferred that the advertisements chosen for the feed were not relatable enough for the participants to want to send to others.

Although shares were not a common form of behavioral engagement in this study, influencers generating the most engagement when it came to likes is extremely useful for marketers to take note of because of social media algorithms that allow posts with more interaction reach greater audiences. Specifically, in a study done by Houldcroft (2017) on the importance of social media metrics, she found that “generating high amounts of likes, comments, and shares leads to increased purchase intention, perceived source credibility, and perceived information usefulness” (p. 30, 2017). Therefore, influencers generating the most likes on a post proves the importance of influencer marketing in reaching large audiences and generating purchase intention.

### **Attention vs Recall**

Furthermore, the present study found that influencers generated cognitive engagement in terms of time spent on a specific post. However, brands generated more engagement in terms of brand recall and brand recognition. According to Chandon (2002), “brand recall cannot be used as a proxy for attention to the brand” (p. 3). Meaning that although influencers may have been largely paid attention to, the brands generated more engagement when it came to recall because attention and time spent on a post has no correlation to whether or not it would be recalled or not.

### **Vampire Effect**

The present study’s results indicate that brands generate more cognitive engagement in terms of brand recall, and although it was proposed that this result was due to brand logo bias and visual brand attention, Luzzi and Rosengarten (2017) explain that brands generating more engagement when it comes to recall is due to the vampire effect. The vampire effect can be described as when endorsers promote a

product that they have no relationship to they essentially “suck the lifeblood of the product dry; the audience remembers the celebrity but not the product” (Evans, p. 35, 1988 as cited in Luzzi & Rosengarten, 2017). Furthermore, the vampire effect seen through celebrity endorsements can also be described as a “decrease in brand recall in an advertisement … with a celebrity endorser compared … [to] the same advertising stimulus with an unknown but equally attractive endorser” (Zenker and Sattler, p. 4, 2015 as cited in Luzzi & Rosengarten, 2017). In Luzzi & Rosengarten’s study (2017), the research aimed to test whether or not influencer promotions have a negative effect on brand recall as compared to brands since the vampire effect provides evidence for negative brand recall in relation to celebrity endorsements. The researchers explain there is a significant relationship between brand recall and the endorser chosen, meaning unless users have a relationship with the endorser chances of brand recall are low. Overall, the study found that “the use of influencers has partially negative effect on brand recall” (Luzzi & Rosengarten, p. 3, 2017) Therefore, in the present study, brands generated more engagement than influencers because there was no relationship between the participants and influencers as well as the fact that influencers could have caused a vampire effect that took away from the product promoted.

### **Control Variables Impacting Results**

Although the research above poses the most logical explanation of the results, there are some alternative ways to interpret the data when considering the different variables that may have affected the results.

***Variation of Product Categories***

The product category chosen for the influencers to promote on the mock Instagram feed was athleisure clothing in order to cater to a wide variety of participants. Clothing is a necessity and therefore it is a very general product category, however to change this product category in the present study may have an effect on the results. For example, if food was chosen to be promoted by influencers responses may have varied depending on the favorability of the food rather than influencer. In addition, if a specific product category for the brands was chosen there would have not been any variation in brand promotional posts also allowing for a possible shift in results.

***Selection of Influencers***

Similar to that of the product categories, the influencers selected for the study could have an impact on the results. For example, according to researchers Leung et. al (2022), factors that enhance influencer effectiveness are “originality, follower size, and sponsor salience” (p. 1). Therefore, a change in the selection of influencers with more followers could have possibly generated more engagement than the nano and micro influencers chosen for the feed. Furthermore, if only one influencer was chosen for the feed a consumer brand relationship as well as a consumer influencer relationship could have been formed causing a difference in results.

***Difference in Gender***

While there were both males and females who participated in the study, I had a majority of female responses generalizing the results to a product of mostly female answers. However, if the roles were reverse and more male respondents participated in the study the results may have differed due to the gender effect, which is discussed in

Luzzi & Rosengarten's (2017) study. The researchers explain "that while females are focussing on all information available, males are more likely to selectively process what they see while mostly looking at visual rather than textual content" (Goodrich, 2014 as cited in Luzzi & Rosengarten, 2017). Furthermore, the study hypothesized that the vampire effect, which was previously discussed in a section above, is more prominent in males, meaning that if there was a shift in gender responses in my study brands could have possibly generated more engagement than influencers due to the way males receive information.

### ***Structure of Social Media Platforms***

The structure of Instagram is very centered on images and aesthetics making it appealing to marketers (Krywalski et al., 2020). In addition, Instagram is a crucial platform used for influencer marketing, making it a perfect platform to use for the study. However, there are still many other social media platforms that are structured differently from Instagram that could have caused a difference in results because of the different ways to engage and connect with brand content as compared to Instagram. For example, shares on Tik Tok can be sent to a wide variety of different platforms where as Instagram only allows for the sharing of content within the app. Therefore, the social media platform Instagram could have had an impact on the results of the study due to the structure of the app.

### **Implications**

The results of the present study indicate that brands and influencers both generate different types of engagement among Generation Z: influencers generating cognitive and behavioral engagement (like and time spent) and brands generating

cognitive (recall and recognition). From these results the following conclusions can be drawn: different social media marketing strategies are effective depending on marketing goals, in terms of engagement influencers can generate likes and time spent on posts regardless of having a relationship with users, and brand advertisements are still effective in generating engagement for Generation Z. Such conclusions have implications for a number of parties including: marketers, influencers, social media platforms, social scientists, and social media users specifically, Generation Z. When it comes to marketers the results provide significant data that contradicts recent studies on the effectiveness of influencer advertising over brand advertisements. This study shows that brand advertisements are still needed in the social media landscape and without brands you can't have influencers. In addition, the results solidify the marketing strategy of implementing both brands and influencers on social media in order to promote products to Generation Z. When it comes to influencers, this study provides insight on how to engage consumers and compete with brand promotions, specifically in terms of cognitive engagement. For social media platforms, this study allows platforms to find better ways to appeal to prospective advertizers who are trying tap into the market of Generation Z. In addition, platforms can adjust their algorithms to measure and track the various types of engagement and to provide users with brand advertisements promoted by influencers and brands. Finally, this study adds to the limited existing literature on Generation Z and consumer engagement on social media opening the door to future and further research.

## Future Directions and Conclusion

The present research aimed to answer the question: How does social media influencer marketing impact Generation Z's consumer engagement on Instagram? In previous literature, topics regarding social media marketing have been explored as well as consumer engagement. Consumer engagement was found to have many definitions pertaining to the social science and psychology fields however nothing derived from social media. Dessart et al. (2016) defined consumer engagement as the "the state that reflects consumers' individual dispositions toward engagement foci", explaining that it "is expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations that go beyond exchange situations" (p. 11). This psychological definition of consumer engagement was used in the present study as the theoretical framework for the research to apply to consumers that engage in a social media setting. The two main marketing strategies found on social media are influencer marketing and brand promotion. According to the existing literature, social media influencers are considered a more effective strategy than brand promotion, however no research was done on the factors that drive engagement when interacting with brands and influencers in a competitive social media setting (Krywalski et al., 2020). In order to bridge the gap between engagement and social media marketing strategies, a mock Instagram feed was created for participants to interact with as if they were scrolling through their own feed. Participants were then given a survey in order to measure their behavioral, cognitive, and behavioral engagement levels generated by the feed. Once the engagement levels of influencers and brands were compared, the results found that both influencers and brands generate different types of engagement. Specifically,

influencers generate both behavioral and cognitive engagement whereas brands generate cognitive engagement in a more significant way. Furthermore, this study found that brands not shown on the feed generated some level of engagement, opening the door to further research on brand favorability and brand bias. In addition, possible further directions could include replicating the study with a larger sample size as well as having more posts on the feed in order to expose participants to a wider variety of advertisements and influencer promotions. Another possible new research direction could be to choose one influencer as a promoter and only have their followers as participants in order to test the impact of influencer user relationships on consumer engagement. Overall, the present study demonstrates the need for both influencers and brands in a competitive marketing world to generate different types of engagement.

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## Appendix 1.

### Consumer Engagement Survey

[Sign in to Google to save your progress.](#)  
[Learn more](#)

\* Indicates required question

Gender \*

- Male
- Female

Race \*

- Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Age \*

- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- Over 18

Do you have social media? \*

Yes

No

If you answered yes, which platforms do \* you use?

Instagram

Tik Tok

Snapchat

Twitter

BeReal

VSCO

Pinterest

YouTube

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How much time do you spend on social \* media day?

less than an hour

1-2 hr

2-3 hr

3-4 hr

4-5 hr

more than 5 hrs

Have you bought anything promoted off \* of a social media app?

Yes

No

Did you like any of the posts on the Instagram feed? \*

Yes

No

Please indicate which posts you liked: \*

Funny posts/memes

Brands Ads

Influencers

Drinks

Tik Toks

Other

Don't Remember

Did you share any of the posts on the Instagram feed? \*

Yes

No

What posts did you share? \*

Funny posts/memes

Brands Ads

Influencers

Drinks

Tik Toks

Other

I didn't share any posts

What posts do you think you spent the most time on? \*

Funny posts/memes  
 Brands Ads  
 Influencers  
 Drinks  
 Tik Toks  
 Other  
 Don't Remember

Do you recall any of the brands posted on the Instagram feed? \*

Yes  
 No

Please indicate which brands you may recall: \*

Modern Citizen  
 Nike  
 Outdoor Voices  
 Party Pants USA  
 Supergoop  
 Hoka  
 Health-Ade  
 The Sill  
 Rumpl  
 I don't recall any brands  
 Other:  

---

Are you interested to learn more about the brands on the feed? \*

Yes  
 No

Please indicate which brands: \*

- Modern Citizen
- Nike
- Outdoor Voices
- Party Pants USA
- Supergoop
- Hoka
- Health-Ade
- The Sill
- Rumpf
- I wasn't interested

Did you personally relate to any posts \*  
promoting the different brands?

- Yes
- No

Please indicate which brands: \*

- Modern Citizen
- Nike
- Outdoor Voices
- Party Pants USA
- Supergoop
- Hoka
- Health-Ade
- The Sill
- Rumpf
- I didn't relate to any brands

In what ways did you relate to the post? \*

- Similar age to person promoting
- Similar post to posts on your feed
- Familiar activities to your activities
- Attractiveness of the person promoting
- Use of favorite colors
- Style of person promoting
- Overall relatable post
- Not sure
- I did not relate to any posts

Did you see any influencers on any of the \*  
posts?

- Yes
- No

If yes, did you recognize any of the \*  
influencers on the feed?

- Yes
- No

Did you recognize any of the brands they \*  
were promoting?

- Yes
- No

Did you recognize any of the brands they \*  
were promoting?

- Yes
- No

Please indicate which brands: \*

- Modern Citizen
- Nike
- Outdoor Voices
- Party Pants USA
- Supergoop
- Hoka
- Health-Ade
- The Sill
- Rumpl
- I did not recognize any brands

After scrolling through the feed, were \*  
you interested in purchasing any  
products promoted?

- Yes
- No

Please indicate which brands had those \*  
products:

- Modern Citizen
- Nike
- Outdoor Voices
- Party Pants USA
- Supergoop
- Hoka
- Health-Ade
- The Sill

Do you follow any influencers on Instagram? \*

Yes

No

Have you ever bought a product or a brand that those influencers have promoted on Instagram? \*

Yes

No

Would you ever buy a product or a brand promoted by an influencer? \*

Yes

No

[Submit](#)

[Clear form](#)