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Influencer Marketing

The Effect of Influencer Credibility on Attitude
towards the Influencer-Brand Collaboration
and Purchase Intention

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Católica Porto Business School
May 2021



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by

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Resumo

O marketing de influenciadores tem sido sugerido como uma fonte importante e com influência na atitude perante a marca e a intenção de compra. Este estudo tem como objetivo compreender o impacto das dimensões da credibilidade do influenciador na intenção de compra, analisando o papel mediador da atitude perante a marca neste relacionamento. Esta pesquisa foi realizada através das redes sociais, e considerou influenciadores do sexo feminino e masculino, incluindo por isso dezasseis perfis de influenciadores e uma marca bem conhecida. A análise dos resultados do estudo demonstra que todas as dimensões da credibilidade do influenciador têm impacto positivo na atitude do consumidor em relação à colaboração entre o influenciador e a marca e na intenção de compra do consumidor. Além disso, os resultados indicam que a confiabilidade percebida do influenciador tem o impacto mais forte na atitude face à colaboração do influenciador com a marca e na intenção de compra do consumidor, seguindo-se a percepção de atratividade, e, por último, a percepção de *expertise*. Comparando os resultados obtidos para o sexo feminino e masculino, este estudo indica que as mulheres percebem as influenciadoras femininas como mais atraentes, confiáveis e *experts*, e têm uma atitude mais positiva perante a colaboração do influenciador com a marca e uma maior intenção de compra do produto promovido. Este estudo contribui para avançar a pesquisa sobre marketing de influenciadores, e para ajudar as marcas a identificarem os requisitos que um influenciador de sucesso deverá preencher, ao enaltecer a relevância das diferentes dimensões de credibilidade de um influenciador.

Palavras-chave: marketing de influenciadores, credibilidade do influenciador, atratividade, confiabilidade, expertise, atitude perante a marca, intenção de compra

Abstract

Influencer marketing has been suggested as an important and influential source to build brand attitude and consumer purchase intention. This study aims to understand the impact of the dimensions of influencer credibility on consumer purchase intention, and to analyse the mediating role of brand attitude in this relationship. This research was conducted through social media networks, and considered both female and male influencers, including sixteen fictional influencer profiles and a well-known brand. Results demonstrate that all the three dimension of influencer credibility have a positive impact on consumer attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration and consumer purchase intention. Moreover, findings indicate that influencer perceived trustworthiness has the strongest impact on attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration and purchase intention, followed by influencer perceived attractiveness, and, lastly, by influencer perceived expertise. The comparison of the results obtained for female and male consumers, indicates that females perceive same sex influencers as more attractive, trustworthy and expert, and have a more positive attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration and higher intention to purchase the product promoted. This research contributes to the existing body of research on influencer marketing, and helps brand managers to identify the requirements that successful influencers should have, by highlighting the relevance of the different influencer credibility dimensions.

Keywords: influencer marketing, influencer credibility, attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, brand attitude, purchase intention

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Introduction

Today the Internet has a critical role in our society (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Since individuals spend more time online, this allowed for a rapid growth of social media marketing (Chang et al., 2015). According to Kim and Ko (2012) consumer-brand interactions are more and more linked to social media platforms, and, hence, these platforms acquired an increasing relevance from a marketing point of view. Thus, social media marketing is an essential element of 21st-century business (Felix et al., 2017), which allows firms to take advantage of the advancements in technology and the Internet for marketing purposes.

A specific approach to social media marketing is influencer marketing, considered by many a specific form of word-of-mouth used to promote a certain product/service or brand (Brown & Hayes, 2008). This concept is directly linked to the decision-making process of the consumer (Brown & Hayes, 2008) and takes advantage of online influencers, who have become a powerful resource for marketing communication (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

This study complements the existing research on the influence of social media marketing on consumers' purchase behaviour (Chang et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2016; Relling et al., 2016), focusing on influencer marketing and the impact of influencer credibility. Previous research suggests that the credibility of the source, in this case the social influencer, is directly related to consumers' attitudes and behavioural responses (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Ohanian, 1990; Petty et al., 1983;

Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017). In this way, it is relevant to study how the different dimensions of influencer credibility can affect consumer attitude towards the collaboration between the influencer and the brand and, consequently, their intention to purchase the promoted product.

This work is structured as follows: first, we present the literature on influencer marketing, influencer credibility, brand attitude and purchase intention; second, we present the conceptual model and hypothesis being studied; then, we describe our research methodology, followed by the discussion of the results; and lastly, we present the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and future research directions.

Theoretical Background

1. Influencer Marketing

Nowadays, communication channels such as TV, radio and newspaper are no longer the main channels for marketing communications (Lou & Yuan, 2019), instead, consumers and brands tend to use social media platforms for marketing purposes (Hair et al., 2010). Given the increasing relevance of social media, brands have been investing more and more in social media communication and, in particular, influencer marketing has been growing exponentially (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencer marketing refers to a marketing communication approach which results into brands investing in social media/online influencers to create and/or promote the brand's content to all of the influencer's followers or subscribers and the brand's target consumers, with the goal of increasing consumer brand awareness (Agrawal, 2016; Brown & Hayes, 2008; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Varsamis, 2018). Influencer marketing is highly related to the increasing use and success of word-of-mouth and relationship marketing (Brown & Hayes, 2008) and has also been established as an extension of word-of-mouth (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can happen through different online channels, such as discussion forums, product reviews, social networking sites and emails (Dwyer et al., 2007).

Influencer marketing has brought relevant changes to several industries and changed the development and implementation of marketing strategies (Levin, 2019). It is used by brands for the achievement of different marketing goals, including: defining a new/different target audience; increasing brand awareness; increasing sales or generating traffic to online platforms, among many other purposes (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Bernoff & Li, 2008; Bianchi & Andrews, 2015; Levin, 2019; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). This rising power of influencer marketing has led to advances in the development of technologies that allow the identification and tracking of the most relevant influencers that can be used by brands, focusing mostly on quantitative factors, including number of followers, numbers of shares on a post, among others (Freberg et al., 2011).

Nowadays, research on social media marketing has been focusing essentially on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, yet Instagram has become relevant for the unique interactions it allows between consumers and brands, and by its rapidly growth in users (Phua et al., 2017; Veirman et al., 2017).

1.1 Social Media Platforms and Instagram

Social media platforms have a very relevant role in a company's marketing strategy, and also in people's lives in general (Tuten & Solomon, 2017), since individuals tend to rely more and more on online social networks (OSN) for their decision-making process, by searching for information and/or reviews online (Barreda et al., 2015). Hence, communication has shifted from in person to online (through a computer or smartphone) (Jeong & Koo, 2015).

Social electronic word-of-mouth occurs when consumers provide information and/or recommend a certain product or brand through any of the various social media networks (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). It can be defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and

institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 39). One of its major advantages when compared to traditional forms of marketing communication is that consumers choose which online influencers and brands they wish to follow, instead of being exposed to, unwanted marketing communications (Childers et al., 2019). Furthermore, social media are more diversified and specialized, making it easier to target a very specific audience (Roca-Sales & Lopez-Garcia, 2017).

Instagram is the fastest growing social platform globally (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), and, according to Levin (2019), Instagram and YouTube are the two platforms with the biggest impact on influencer marketing, since individuals spend more time on Instagram than on other similar sites (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). This network consists of a mobile phone application in which individuals share photos and videos, both within the platform and other social networks (Frommer, 2010). Instagram is also a social media network which allows its users to gain followers, connect with different users and brands, and facilitates social interactions among consumers (Blight et al., 2017). According to Statista (2021), Instagram is largely dominated by Generation Z and Millennials, and counts with over 1 billion users worldwide (Abrams, 2020). Thus, nowadays businesses use Instagram influencers to connect with consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

1.2 Social Media Influencers vs Celebrities

Social media influencers (SMIs) embody a new and diverse type of independent endorsers who impact consumers’ behaviours and attitudes through digital platforms (Freberg et al., 2011) – such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube – and are also referred to as micro-celebrities (Chae, 2018). The term micro-celebrities was first used by Senft in 2001 when researching on camgirls – described as women who broadcast their lives on the Internet (Senft, 2013). SMIs are active online individuals with a considerable number of

followers, who can be described as “ordinary people” posting their content online – as opposed to the “non-ordinary people”, celebrities – (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Lou and Yuan (2019) describe SMIs as content generators, who have a status of expertise in a particular field, with a considerable number of followers.

Younger markets are considered to be highly influenced by today’s SMIs (Levin, 2019), since a message coming from an online influencer appears to come from a more relatable and reliable individual, a “person like you or me”, and not from a company that may be perceived as trying to scam consumers into buying their products, for their own benefit (Jahnke, 2018; Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018). Statistics show that 49% of consumers follow influencer recommendations when considering to purchase a product, and 40% have purchased a product recommended by an influencer (Digital Marketing Institute, 2018).

One of the main differences between influencers and traditional celebrities online is that while audiences hunger for someone who will speak at them, communities built by or for influencers require someone who speaks with them (Senft, 2013). Thus, influencer’s ability to engage and create a relationship with consumers, makes their endorsement of a product more credible, reliable and familiar, as opposed to a celebrity endorsement promotion strategy (Berger et al., 2016). Previous research also suggests that when consumers are exposed to an influencer-brand collaboration post, they show more positive attitudes toward the endorsed brand than consumers exposed to traditional celebrity-brand collaboration posts (Jin et al, 2019).

Understanding how influencer endorsements can be best used in a communication strategy is essential, as influencers are human and cannot be controlled by the company, posing a risk of negative attention and/or consequences for the brand (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). Previous research shows that the credibility of the online influencer endorser delivering the marketing message is an essential dimension when measuring the effectiveness of

influencer marketing, since it affects consumer's level of acceptance (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990; Schlecht, 2003).

2. Source Credibility

Source credibility can be defined as the positive characteristic of the communicator (influencer) that impacts the receiver's (consumer) acceptance of the message (advertising message) (Ohanian, 1990). Previous research on influencer credibility falls upon two existing models – the source-credibility model by Hovland et al. (1953) and the source-attractiveness model by McGuire (1985) – the first analysing the factors which influence the communicator's perceived credibility and the second studying how the source's "familiarity", "similarity", "likability" and "attractiveness" influence the effectiveness of the message (Ohanian, 1990).

Source credibility is defined by some researchers as one of the characteristics that influences the perception that an individual has over the persuasiveness of the communicator (Metzger et al., 2003). Hovland et al. (1953) have identified and suggested a two-dimensional conception to source credibility – perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness (Berlo et al. 1969; Metzger et al., 2003; Ohanian, 1990; Whitehead, 1968). A third dimension has been added by some authors to the two previously mentioned, namely, the physical attractiveness of the endorser (Chaiken, 1979; Joseph, 1982; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Ohanian, 1990). Other researchers have identified secondary dimensions of source credibility, adding to the two previously mentioned, such as safety, dynamism, sociability, composure and similarity (Berlo et al., 1969; Gass & Seiter, 1999; Jurma, 1981; McCroskey, 1966; Metzger et al., 2003; Perloff, 1993; Whitehead, 1968). Ohanian (1990) suggested that source credibility should be evaluated through three

dimensions – perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness – and this three dimensional conceptualization of credibility has been widely adapted.

According to Metzger et al. (2003), different researchers have used different scales for measuring source credibility, depending on the conceptualization adopted and the dimensions that they consider that source credibility encompasses. At this respect, it is important to highlight the scales developed by McCroskey (1966; McCroskey et al., 1974; McCroskey & Jenson, 1975), Berlo et al. (1969), Leathers (1992) and Ohanian (1990).

The concept of source credibility proposed by Hovland et al. (1953) and Aristotle's concept of ethos – the good character of the speaker (Aristotle, as cited in Giffin, 1967) – are both close to the value of trust an individual has on the communicator and the message (Giffin, 1967). A more credible source is one that is more effective at persuasion (McGinnies, 1973), thus, many studies show that the credibility of the source is directly related to consumers' attitudes and behavioural responses (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Ohanian, 1990; Petty et al., 1983).

2.1 Attractiveness

Attractiveness has become an important factor in celebrity and influencer endorsement (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Caballero et al., 1989; Caballero & Solomon, 1984; DeSarbo & Harshman, 1985; Patzer, 1983). Giffin (1967) suggested that personal attraction (or attractiveness) is one of the five dimensions of a speaker's ethos or source credibility. Previous studies suggest attractiveness to be one of the secondary dimensions of source credibility (Giffin, 1967).

The source's physical attractiveness is very important when trying to reach individuals and change their beliefs (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Chaiken, 1979; Debevec & Kernan, 1984), and also to increase their purchase intentions (Friedman et al., 1976; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983; Petrosenius & Crocker, 1989), since a more attractive source is most likely to be successful in these matters.

2.2 Expertise

Previous research shows that perceived expertise is one of the factors that affects source credibility (Giffin, 1967; Hovland et al., 1953; McCroskey, 1966). Perceived expertise is directly linked to the qualifications and knowledge the communicator has over a certain topic (Hovland et al., 1953), which allow him/her to be seen as a source of valid information by the receiver of the information (Giffin, 1967). This concept may be influenced by a number of variables – (1) age, (2) position of leadership, (3) similarity to the receiver regarding status, values, interest and needs – (Hovland et al., 1953, as cited in Giffin, 1967).

Previous research suggests that when a consumer perceives an endorser as expert, they're more persuaded by the advertisement (Amos et al., 2008; Ohanian, 1991; Speck et al., 1988).

2.3 Trustworthiness

When influencers build warm and personal relationships with their audiences, they are perceived as more trustworthy (Silvera & Austad, 2004). Within the marketing field, trust can be described as “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (Moorman et al., 1992). According to Racherla et al. (2012), trust can be increased by the quality of the information being shared (a content element) and/or the perceived background similarity between the consumer and the source (reflecting a social element). Moreover, in an advertising context, trustworthiness is directly linked to the integrity of the source and the perceived confidence of the receiver of the message in the communicator and his ability to convey a valid, honest and truthful message (Erdogan, 1999; Hovland et al., 1953; McGinnies & Ward, 1980).

The communicator's character has a great impact on the persuasiveness of the message, meaning that a trustworthy communicator is more persuasive and

effective in making the customer more confident about the brand (Ohanian, 1990).

3. Brand Attitude

The dimensions of credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise) can be related to more favourable consumer attitude towards the endorsed brand (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017), and are therefore fundamental for the development of a successful marketing strategy (Solomon et al., 2010).

Attitudes are commonly used in predicting consumer's behaviour (Mitchell & Olson, 1981), and are described as constant evaluations over people, things or goods (Engel et al., 2006), which relate to the individual's level of affection towards them (Thurstone, 1931). At this respect, attitude towards the brand depends on the consumer's personal perceptions of a brand and is suggested as a predictor of consumers' behaviour towards brands (Shimp, 2010).

Thus, Mitchell and Olson (1981, p.318) define attitude towards the brand as an "individual's internal evaluation of the brand". Furthermore, "attitude toward the brand is a relatively enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behavior" (Spears & Singh, 2004, p.55). In other words, brand attitude is a consumer's positive or negative response and/or evaluation, after being exposed to a brand (Phelps & Hoy, 1996; Wilkie, 1986). According to Garvin (1984), brand attitude is related to certain attributes, such as durability, incidence of defects, serviceability, features, performance and fit and finish.

The constructs of brand attitude and purchase intention have been highly related in previous research, namely within the marketing and advertising fields

(Aaker & Keller, 1990; Mackenzie & Spreng, 1992; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Spears & Singh, 2004).

4. Purchase Intention

Attitudes and intentions are two different concepts – attitudes, as previously mentioned, are overall evaluations, while intentions represent the motivation to carry out a behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Spears & Singh, 2004), however, they tend to be related.

Purchase intention can be defined as the personal actions, attitudes or behaviours towards the brand (Bagozzi et al., 1979; Ostrom, 1969). Spears and Singh (2004, p. 56) defined purchase intention as “an individual’s conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand”. According to the same authors, this particular concept may be used to evaluate customers’ product perceptions. This concept has also been defined as the consumer’s willingness to purchase a product/service again or the promise to one’s self to frequent the store again when shopping (Dodds et al., 1991; Fandos & Flavian, 2006; Halim & Hamed, 2005; Shao et al., 2004; Tariq et al., 2013). According to Jin and Kang (2011), purchase intention is related to four consumer behaviours, such as the absolute plan to buy the product; thinking explicitly to purchase the product; expecting to buy the product in the future; and to buy the specific product completely.

For companies, it is key to increase consumers’ purchase intention, and this will allow them to maximize the sales of their products or service and, thereby, their profits (Tariq et al., 2013).

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis

Endorsement, in this case influencer endorsement, has been established as a major strategy for brands to positively impact consumers' attitudes towards the endorsed brand or product (Atkin & Block, 1983; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Langmeyer & Walker, 1991; McCracken, 1989; Mowen & Brown, 1981; Singh & Banerjee, 2018; Till & Busler, 2000; Till & Shimp, 1998). Moreover, when brands use influencer marketing, they should acknowledge that consumers use influencer credibility not only to interpret the marketing message, but also to form their own attitude towards the communication and the brand/product promote (Ling & Liu, 2008).

Brand attitude, also known as attitude towards the brand, and purchase intention are two of the most popular constructs studied, especially within the framework of attitude towards the advertisement (Spears & Singh, 2004).

Thus, the aim of this study is to understand the impact of influencers' credibility on consumer attitudes towards the influencer-brand collaboration and, consequently, on consumers' purchase behaviour.

1. Influencer credibility

Examining the effectiveness of endorsers is important for practitioners and academics (Kaikati, 1987). The credibility of the influencer delivering the marketing message is an essential factor when measuring the persuasiveness and effectiveness of that message (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990; Schlecht, 2003), since a higher credibility of the source results into a higher persuasiveness of the marketing message (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993 as cited in Wu & Wang, 2011; Zhang & Buda, 1999). Prior research has also established a strong link between the credibility of the source (the online

influencer) and consumers' brand evaluations, as higher credibility leads to more favourable consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards the endorsed brand or product/service (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Ohanian, 1990; Petty et al., 1983). The study of Wu and Wang (2011) showed that the influencer's perceived credibility has a strong impact on brand attitude.

1.1. Attractiveness

Perceived attractiveness is one of the three components of the source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990) and is directly linked to the effectiveness of the message (McGuire, 1969). The study of Kahle and Homer (1985) has shown that an attractive influencer, from the consumer's perspective, has a positive influence on consumer's attitude towards the brand and his/her purchase intention. Similar results have been found in the study of Till and Busler (2000).

Therefore, we assume the following hypothesis:

H.1: Influencer's perceived attractiveness has a positive impact on consumers' attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration.

1.2. Expertise

Perceived expertise is another dimension of the source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990). Influencer endorsers who are perceived as experts (those who have a higher level of expertise) are more likely to be successful when persuading consumers with an advertisement message (Amos et al., 2008; Ohanian, 1991; Speck et al., 1988). The study of Till and Busler (2000) found that expertise has a direct and positive impact on consumers' attitudes towards the brand, meaning a higher perceived expertise resulted into a higher brand attitude.

Therefore, based on previous research, we propose the following hypothesis:

H.2: Influencer's perceived expertise has a positive impact on consumers' attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration.

1.3. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has been identified by many authors as one of the main dimensions of influencer credibility, since a message delivered by a source that is perceived as trustworthy is also considered to be a more believable message (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Therefore, an endorsement by an influencer who is perceived as honest, believable, dependable and overall trustworthy could be a good brand promotion strategy to follow, since a greater perceived trustworthiness of the influencer by the consumer results into a higher efficacy of the endorser (Choo, 1964; Horai et al., 1974; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Mishra et al., 2015). Influencer's perceived trustworthiness plays an important purpose in an influencer endorsement strategy and has been proven to have a positive effect on consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017).

Hence, we assume the following hypothesis for this study:

H.3: Influencer's perceived trustworthiness has a positive impact on consumers' attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration.

2. Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention

The Internet, and especially social media, have changed how consumers and marketers communicate (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, Nambisan & Baron, 2007). Therefore, social media networks are a very effective platform for eWOM (Canhoto & Clark, 2013; Erkan & Evans, 2014; Knoll & Proksch, 2015; Toder-Alon et al., 2014). According to the existing literature, eWOM has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention (Iyengar et al., 2009; Wallace et al., 2009; Wang et

al., 2012; See-To & Ho, 2014), and should be used by brands to provide consumers with information about products/services and/or the brand itself, which then influences their attitudes and behaviours (Lin et al., 2018).

Previous research has studied the relation between brand attitude and purchase intention, more precisely, the impact the first has over the latter, on the endorsement context (Batra & Ray, 1986; MacKenzie et al., 1986; MacKenzie & Spreng, 1992). Brand attitude, as well as other variables (e.g. brand credibility), has been proved to have a favourable effect on consumer's willingness to purchase the product being endorsed, as a positive attitude towards the brand leads to a higher intention to purchase the product or brand (Bagozzi et al., 1979; Daneshwary & Schwer, 2000; Ostrom, 1969).

Hence, we assume the following hypothesis:

H.4: Consumer's attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration has a positive impact on their purchase intention of the product promoted.

Having in consideration the theoretical background previously presented and the hypotheses being tested, we propose the research model presented in figure 1.

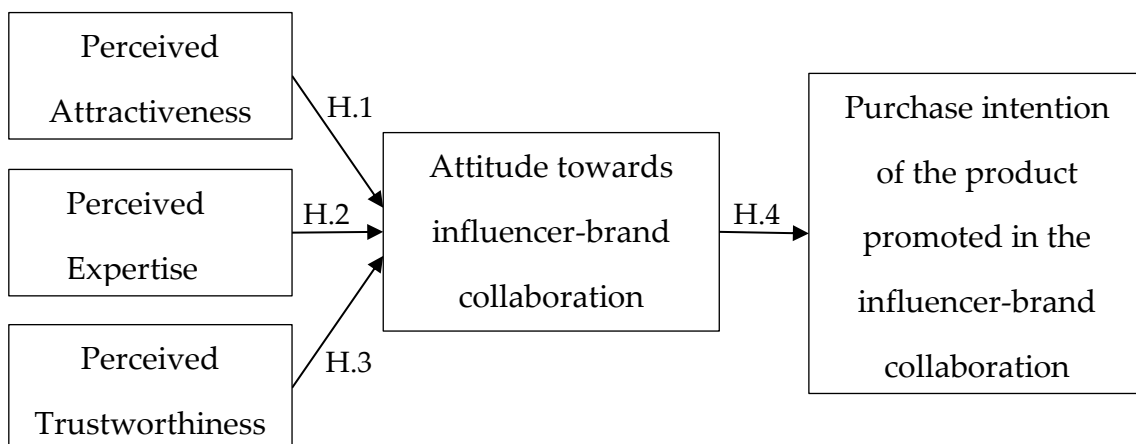


Figure 1 – Research Model

Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

This study focuses on understanding how social media influencer's credibility impacts brand attitude and, consequently, purchase intention. The research is going to be conducted through an initial qualitative research and following by quantitative analyses. The first phase required the analysis of existing literature, in order to understand the concepts under analysis and support the conceptual framework for this study. The second phase consisted of data collection through an online questionnaire. Data collection took place through online channels, since this method results into lower costs and faster response time (Deutskens et al., 2006), allows for question filter (for example, answering yes or no to a question leads to different sections) and the data can be automatically transferred to a database (Bryman, 2012, p. 671). Previous research also suggests that respondents are more honest when using this method, as they feel safer and anonymous (Deutskens et al., 2006).

This dissertation has an exploratory nature, since the impact of social media influencers on Instagram has not been studied in-depth, and an explanatory nature, since it is based on quantitative research. Quantitative methods are used to study a theory through measurement of variables with a numeric outcome (Field, 2018, p. 1301).

3.2. Population and Sample

According to Polit and Hungler (1999, p. 37), population refers to the aggregate or totality of the objects, subjects or members that could be included in the study, given specific circumstances. Since studying the entire population for this study is impossible, only a sample of the population will be studied. According to Fortin (2009), a sample is a fraction of the total population and every element of it should include certain characteristics present in the population. For this research, the sample used is composed by Portuguese individuals aged 18 years old and above, who have an Instagram account. The snowball sampling method has been used, since individuals have been asked to share the questionnaire with other people.

3.3. Pretest and Results

For this research, the respondents' perception of the influencer's characteristics is fundamental. Thus, we used fictitious influencers (as opposed to real life influencers) for better experimental control regarding the characteristics under study.

Since the endorsed product category is sex-specific, as females and males have different expectations regarding fashion products (Rocha et al., 2005), it is relevant to consider participants' sex and influencers' sex, similarly to the study of Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020).

As presented in the literature review, influencer credibility, the independent variable under analysis, is composed by three dimensions, namely, perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). In order to identify influencers for this study, it was relevant to select appropriate pictures of attractive and unattractive female and male influencers, hence, a pretest was conducted.

Regarding perceived expertise and trustworthiness, no pretest was conducted as the manipulations were controlled through scenario description based on existing literature on the two dimensions. In this way, these dimensions were manipulated in order for influencers to be perceived as expert/non-expert and trustworthy/untrustworthy, as explained in section 3.4.2. of the study design.

3.3.1. Pretest on attractiveness

In the pretest, participants were presented with pictures of the faces of unknown individuals. The pictures were selected from free image databases. There were two versions of the pretest questionnaire, one including four pictures of women and another version with four pictures of men. Respondents were submitted to either version 1 or 2 based on their sex – women were exposed to version 1 containing pictures of women; and men were exposed to version 2 containing pictures of men. Participants rated the attractiveness of the fictitious influencers on a 5 items 7 point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree, adapted from Ohanian (1990).

In order to choose the pictures to represent attractive female and male influencers we based ourselves in the literature review. According to existing literature (Liu & Brock, 2011; Fink et al., 2004), a female endorser is perceived as physically attractive when she features an excellent body shape, a fancy face shape, a good smile, long blonde hairstyle and is wearing light makeup. According to the study of Till & Busler (2000), male endorsers are perceived as attractive when they have bright eyes, slim eyebrow shape and no facial hair. Given the lack of literature to define the characteristics that we should manipulate in the case of male endorsers, we adopted the features from Liu & Brock (2011) which we considered to be suitable for an attractive influencer of both sexes, namely, a good body shape and a fancy face. This information is synthesized in table 1.

Thus, stimuli 1 and 3 represent an attractive female influencer with the following characteristics: long light hair, light makeup, fancy face, beautiful smile and a good body shape. Stimuli 2 and 4 represent an unattractive female influencer with short dark hair, no makeup, plain face, no smile and a large body shape. Stimuli 5 and 7 represent an attractive male influencer with the following characteristics: fancy face, no facial hair, slim eyebrows, sharp eye look and a good body shape. Stimuli 6 and 8 represents an unattractive male influencer with the following characteristics: plain face, facial hair, thick eyebrows, dull eye look and a large body shape.

Study	Features	Attractive Female	Attractive Male
	Body Shape	Good	Good
Liu & Brock (2011)	Facial Features	Fancy	Fancy
	Smile	Beautiful	-
	Hair Colour	Light	-
Fink et al. (2004)	Hair Length	Long	-
	Makeup	Light	-
	Facial Hair	-	No
Till & Busler (2000)	Eyebrow Shape	-	Slim
	Eye Look	-	Sharp

Table 1 – Features to determine attractive/unattractive pictures of women and men

Thus, four pictures of women and four pictures of men have been selected for the pretest according to the previously mentioned criteria. A total of 65 participants responded to either the female or male version of the pretest questionnaire through social media channels, with 34 answers (52.3%) to the female version and 31 (47.7%) to the male version.

Two ANOVAs followed by Bonferroni post hoc tests have been conducted on SPSS, one for each sex, in order to identify the most attractive/unattractive female and male stimulus subjects.

The ANOVA for the female stimulus subjects was significant ($p < 0.001$). The female stimuli with the highest mean difference ($M_{Diff} = 4.647$; $SE = 0.213$) were stimulus 3 ($M = 6.276$; $SD = 0.799$) and stimulus 4 ($M = 1.629$; $SD = 0.566$), thus, those have been selected as the attractive (stimulus 3) and unattractive (stimulus 4) stimuli for the following procedure. The difference between the two stimuli was significant ($p < 0.001$). This information is synthesized in tables 2 and 3.

The ANOVA for the male stimulus subjects was significant ($p < 0.001$). The male stimuli with the biggest mean difference ($M_{Diff} = 3.432$; $SE = 0.261$) were stimulus 5 ($M = 5.316$; $SD = 1.253$) and stimulus 8 ($M = 1.884$; $SD = 0.647$), thus those have been selected as the attractive (stimuli 5) and unattractive (stimuli 8) material for the following procedure. The difference between the two stimuli was significant ($p < 0.001$). This information is synthesized in tables 2 and 3.

	Attractiveness	Mean	Standard Deviation
Female	Stimuli 1	3.912	0.736
	Stimuli 2	2.406	0.474
	Stimuli 3	6.276	0.799
	Stimuli 4	1.629	0.566
Male	Stimuli 5	5.316	1.253
	Stimuli 6	1.948	0.693
	Stimuli 7	5.090	1.529
	Stimuli 8	1.884	0.647

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics for attractiveness. Source: SPSS Output

Differences	Mean	Standard Error	Sig. (2-tailed)
Stimuli 3 & Stimuli 4	4.647	0.213	0.000
Stimuli 5 & Stimuli 8	3.432	0.261	0.000

Table 3 – Attractiveness Paired Samples Tests for selected subjects. Source: SPSS Output

To measure the reliability of the scale used to measure the attractiveness in the pretest, we calculated the Cronbach’s Alpha developed by Lee Cronbach (1951) for each stimuli. According to Hill and Hill (2012) classification, this analysis indicated a lower internal consistency for the scale when applied to evaluate the attractiveness of stimulus 2, and a good or excellent internal consistency for the other stimuli. For the stimuli selected for the main study, the attractiveness scale had a good (stimuli 4 and 8) and excellent internal consistency (stimuli 3 and 5) (see tables 4 and 5).

Attractiveness	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Classification
Stimulus 1	5	0.859	Good
Stimulus 2	5	0.689	Bad
Stimulus 3	5	0.941	Excellent
Stimulus 4	5	0.832	Good
Stimulus 5	5	0.943	Excellent
Stimulus 6	5	0.872	Good
Stimulus 7	5	0.925	Excellent
Stimulus 8	5	0.858	Good

Table 4 – Cronbach's Alpha for attractiveness. Source: SPSS Output

Cronbach's Alpha	Below 0.6	Between 0.6 – 0.7	Between 0.7 – 0.8	Between 0.8 – 0.9	Above 0.9
Classification	Unacceptable	Bad	Acceptable	Good	Excellent

Table 5 – Cronbach's Alpha Classification according to Hill & Hill (2012)

3.4. Subjects, materials and procedure

3.4.1. Product category

This investigation was based on a fictitious scenario in which influencers promoted a Zara product of the latest collection, through the social media platform Instagram. Instagram social network has been selected for this study since the majority of social influencers (78%) use this platform for brand collaborations (Clement, 2018).

The selected brand for this study was Zara as in 2020 it was the second most valuable clothing brand worldwide (Shahbandeh, 2020), having a very high presence both globally and in Portugal (with 70 physical stores in the country) (Statista, 2020). According to Santoro (2020), Zara is the most tagged brand on Instagram, which indicates its high usage for influencer marketing purposes.

Since the endorsed product category is sex-specific, it is relevant to consider participants' sex and influencers' sex. Thus, female participants were exposed to a female influencer collaboration, and male participants were exposed to a male influencer collaboration.

3.4.2. Study design

This study had a 2 (high versus low attractiveness) x 2 (high versus low expertise) x 2 (high versus low trustworthiness) experimental design.

The manipulation occurred by means of an influencer Instagram post endorsing a non-specified product by Zara.

Fictional influencers have been created for this study, as this brings several advantages regarding experimental control (Till & Busler, 2000) and to avoid external effects, such as consumers' preferences, likability and familiarity. Thus, influencer credibility dimensions (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) have been manipulated (high vs low).

The stimulus manipulation for attractiveness was based on the results of the pretest, which guided the selection of the pictures of the attractive and unattractive female and attractive and unattractive male influencers used in this research.

Expertise, in this case, relates to the influencer's aptitude to evaluate and select fashionable and elegant clothing (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020), thus, this variable can be manipulated by presenting the influencer's area of education, which might be related to fashion or not. Hence, influencers with high level of expertise were described as having a master's degree in fashion in London College of Fashion, United Kingdom, as this is one of the top fashion schools in the world according to Business of Fashion and CEOWORLD Magazine Ranking (Balan, 2021); influencers with low expertise were described as having studied computer science, as this is believed to be a field with no relation to fashion and

its students are stereotyped as nerds, with a careless sense of fashion, and “badly dressed” (García-Crespo et al., 2008).

Trustworthiness was manipulated by describing the trustworthy influencer as honest, sincere and trustworthy, similarly to the manipulation in the study of McGinnies and Ward (1980). Additionally, trustworthiness has been linked to selflessness (Walster et al., 1966), thus, a trustworthy influencer has been described as a selfless, fair person who tries to provide an honest review, including slight criticism of the product when applicable. Opposite to this, untrustworthy influencers were described as selfish, trying to please brands by saying excessive positive comments about the product and overall not honest and sincere. This information is presented in table 6.

Description	
Expertise	
Expert	Has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school
Non expert	Has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college
Trustworthiness	
Trustworthy	Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information
Untrustworthy	Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. Their reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.

Table 6 – Expertise and trustworthiness variables description

	Description
Expertise	
Expert	Apaixonado(a) por moda, é mestre em moda pela prestigiada escola London College of Fashion, no Reino Unido.
Non expert	Apaixonado(a) por computadores e videojogos, é licenciado(a) em ciência de computadores.
Trustworthiness	
Trustworthy	Procura sempre dar uma opinião verdadeira sobre os produtos que experimenta, quer seja positiva ou negativa, sendo por isso considerado(a) honesto(a) e sincero(a) pelos seus seguidores.
Untrustworthy	Tem tendência a exagerar nos elogios aos produtos ou marcas que experimenta, nunca referindo qualquer aspeto negativo. As suas avaliações sobre os produtos parecem forçadas para agradar às marcas e obter o máximo de produtos ou retorno possível.

Table 7 – Expertise and trustworthiness variables description translated to Portuguese

3.4.3. Questionnaire

Having in consideration the results obtained in the pretest regarding the variable attractiveness and the manipulations of the other two variables, namely expertise and trustworthiness, eight different versions of the questionnaire were developed for each sex, based on the levels (high versus low) of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of the fictitious influencers (see table 8).

Questionnaire	Expertise	Trustworthiness	Attractiveness
1	High	High	High
2	High	High	Low
3	High	Low	High
4	High	Low	Low
5	Low	High	High
6	Low	High	Low
7	Low	Low	High
8	Low	Low	Low

Table 8 – Versions of questionnaires based on different levels of attributes (low/high)

Next to the previously selected pictures of attractive and unattractive influencers, there was a text describing the influencer, as scenario description is also commonly used in physical attractiveness research (Liu et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2010; Liu & Brock, 2011; Till & Busler, 2000).

The data were collected through a web questionnaire that was shared on social media networks. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: first, participants were asked a demographic question, namely their sex, to redirect them to the same sex stimulus; second, they were asked to answer some questions regarding the brand Zara; third, they were presented with a short explanation of the collaboration and one of the sixteen possible profiles, according to the previously mentioned, and asked to assess the influencer's level of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, as well as their attitude towards the collaboration and purchase intention; lastly, further demographic questions have been asked.

3.4.4. Scales

The variables under analysis were measured through valid scales adapted from previous studies.

Each influencer credibility dimensions was measured through a 5 items scale developed by Ohanian (1990), whose items are represented in the table below (see table 9). These scales have been adapted into 7 point Likert-type scales, ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree”, in order to understand respondents’ positions for each item.

Expertise	Expert	Ohanian (1990)
	Experienced	
	Knowledgeable	
	Qualified	
	Skilled	
Trustworthiness	Dependable	Ohanian (1990)
	Honest	
	Reliable	
	Sincere	
	Trustworthy	
Attractiveness	Attractive	Ohanian (1990)
	Classy	
	Beautiful	
	Elegant	
	Sexy	

Table 9 – Expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness scale. Adapted from Ohanian (1990)

Consumer attitudes towards the brand and towards the influencer-brand collaboration were measured using items adapted from Grossman and Till (1998) and Simonin and Ruth (1998). These questions were measured through a semantic differential scale, from 1 to 7, with opposite adjectives at each extreme, as it is represented in the following table (see table 10).

Attitude	Bad/Good	
	Negative/Positive	Simonin & Ruth (1998)
	Unfavourable/Favourable	
	Unpleasant/Pleasant	Grossman & Till (1998)
	Boring/Interesting	

Table 10 – Attitude towards brand/influencer-brand collaboration scale. Adapted from Simonin & Ruth (1998) and Groosman & Till (1998)

Purchase intention is measured using a scale adapted from Dodds et al. (1991), composed of 3 items, as seen in the following table (see table 11). The questions are measured through a 7 point Likert-type scale, from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree”.

Purchase Intention	It is likely that I purchase the product	
	I pretend to purchase the product	Dodds et al. (1991)
	I am willing to purchase the product	

Table 11 – Purchase intention scale. Adapted from Dodds et al. (1991)

Results

4.1. Preliminary Analysis

4.1.1. Data Collection

The data collection for this study was conducted through digital platforms between 15th April 2021 and 28th April 2021. 361 answers were collected in total for the eight versions of the questionnaire, with 40 answers to questionnaire 1, 38 to questionnaire 2, 39 to questionnaire 3, 37 to questionnaire 4, 42 to questionnaire 5, 51 to questionnaire 6, 38 to questionnaire 7, and 76 to questionnaire 8. After removing the answers that did not fulfil all the requirements, namely being from respondents over 18 years old, the final sample included 358 complete answers.

4.1.2. Demographic Characterization

The sample is composed by 43.6% male respondents and 56.4% female respondents (see Figure 2). Regarding the age distribution, 32.9% of respondents were aged between 18 and 24 years old, 45% between 25 and 34 years old, 12.6% between 35 and 44 years old, and 9.5% over the age of 44 years old (see Figure 3). In terms of education level, 5.3% of individuals complemented the elementary school, 35.2% completed high school, 0.3% graduated from a vocational technical school, 40.2% have a college degree, 18.4% a post-graduation or Master's degree and 0.6% a PhD (see Figure 4). Most respondents were from the Porto district (86.6%), followed by Aveiro (7.5%), Braga (2.2%) and Lisbon (2%) and a very small percentage from other districts (0.3% from Madeira, 0.8% from Viana do Castelo, 0.3% from Setúbal and 0.3% from Viseu) (see Figure 5).

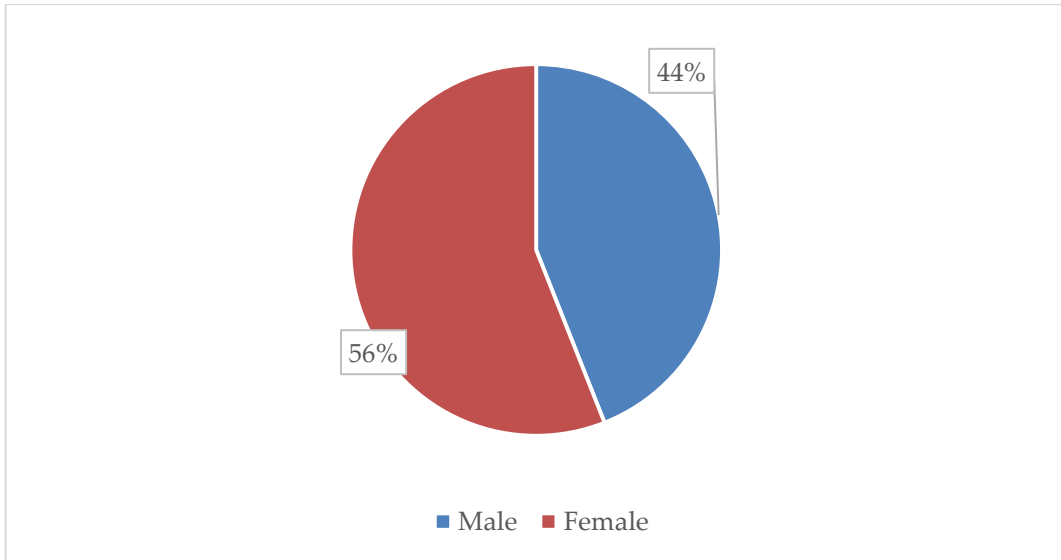


Figure 2 – Total Sex Distribution

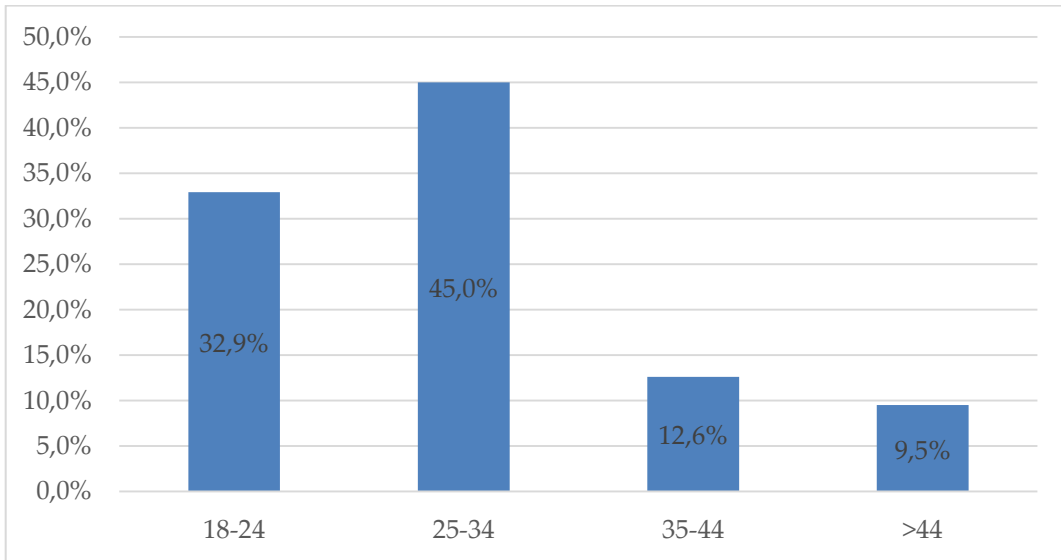


Figure 3 – Total Age Distribution

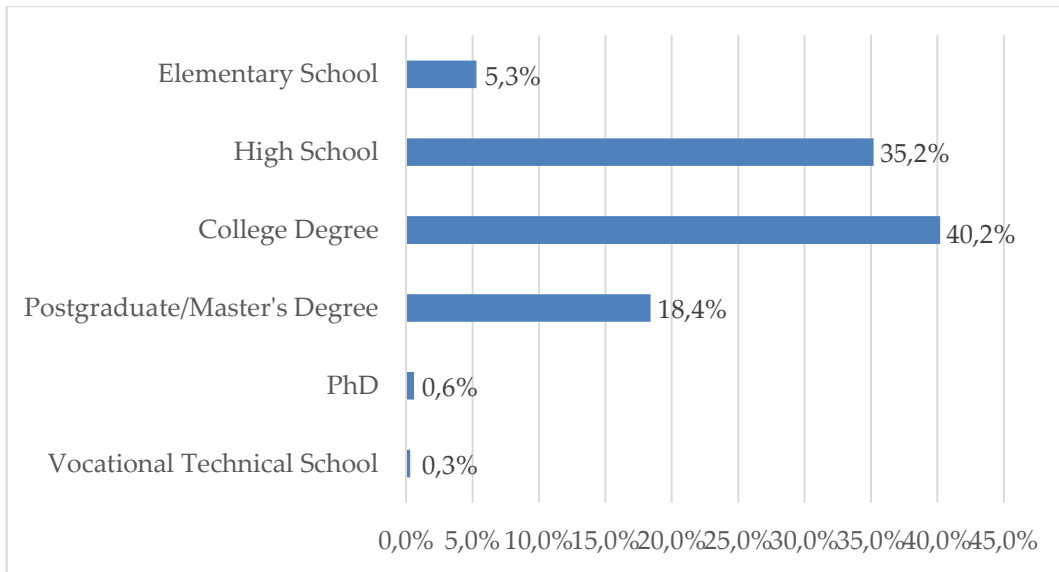


Figure 4 – Education Level Distribution

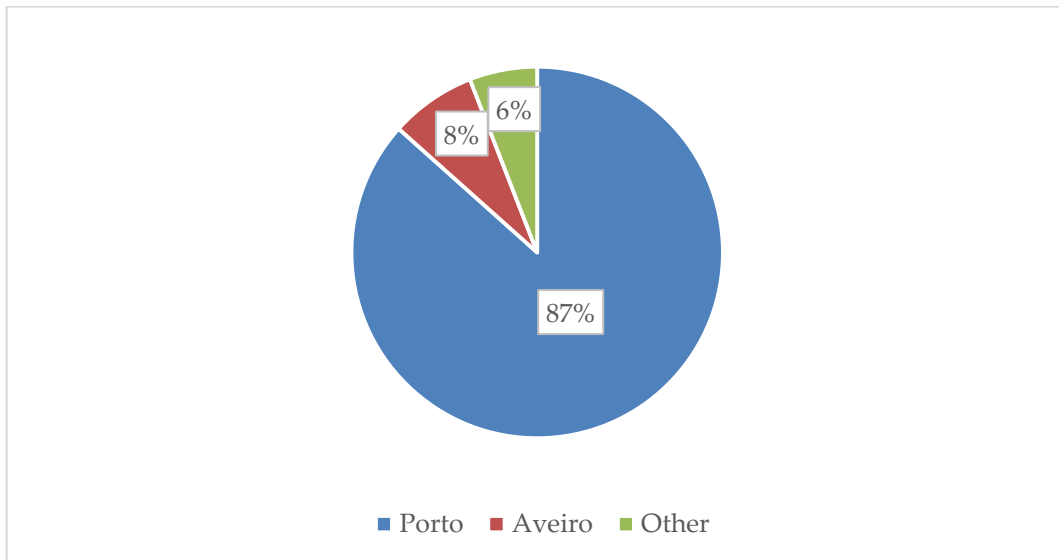


Figure 5 – District Distribution

Regarding Instagram usage, most respondents use the social network often, as 48.3% use it more than once a day and 30.8% daily, while 8.9% use it weekly, 8.1% rarely use it and 3.9% never use it (see Figure 6). In terms of the number of influencers they follow, 12.3% do not follow any social media influencer, 34.9% follow between one and ten, 23.7% follow between ten and twenty, 15.7% follow between twenty and fifty and 13.4% follow over 50 social influencers (see Figure 7).

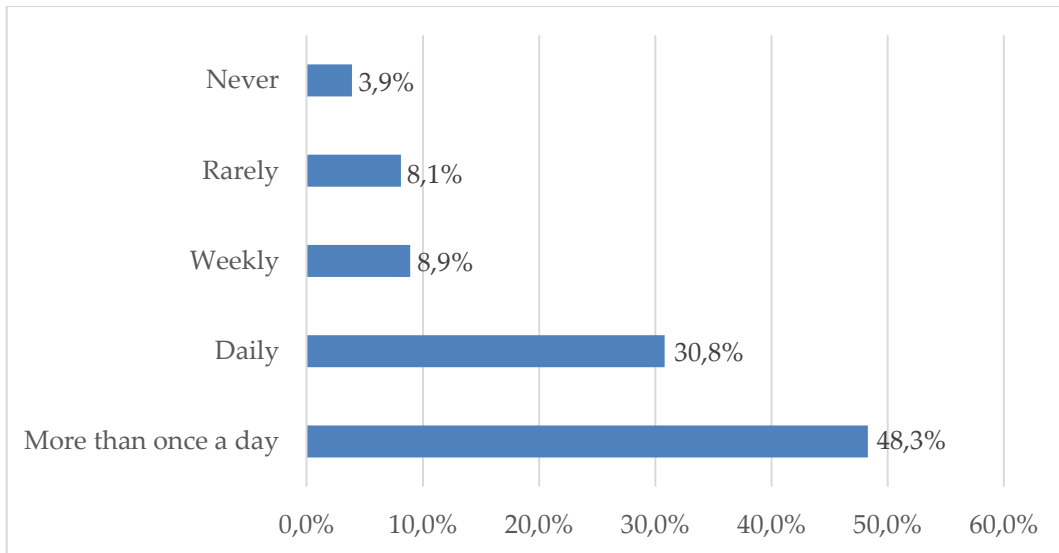


Figure 6 – Instagram Usage Distribution

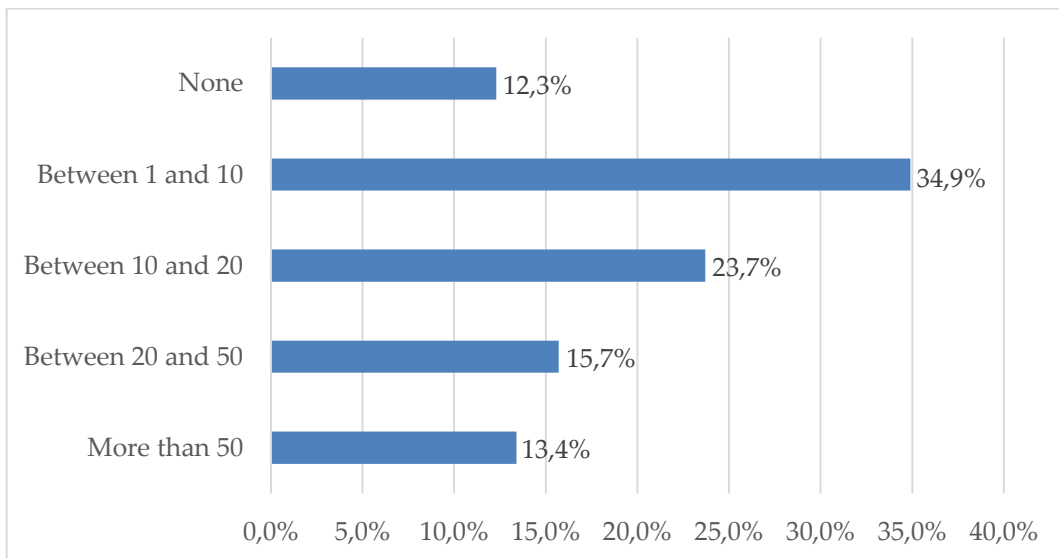


Figure 7 – Social Influencers follows on Instagram Distribution

Regarding the brand Zara, almost all participants were familiar with the brand (99.4%) and only 0.6% did not know Zara (see Figure 8). A high percentage of respondents somewhat frequently purchase Zara products (42.2%), 12.8% purchase the brand's products very frequently, 40.2% rarely purchase from the brand and 4.7% never purchase any products from Zara (see Figure 9).

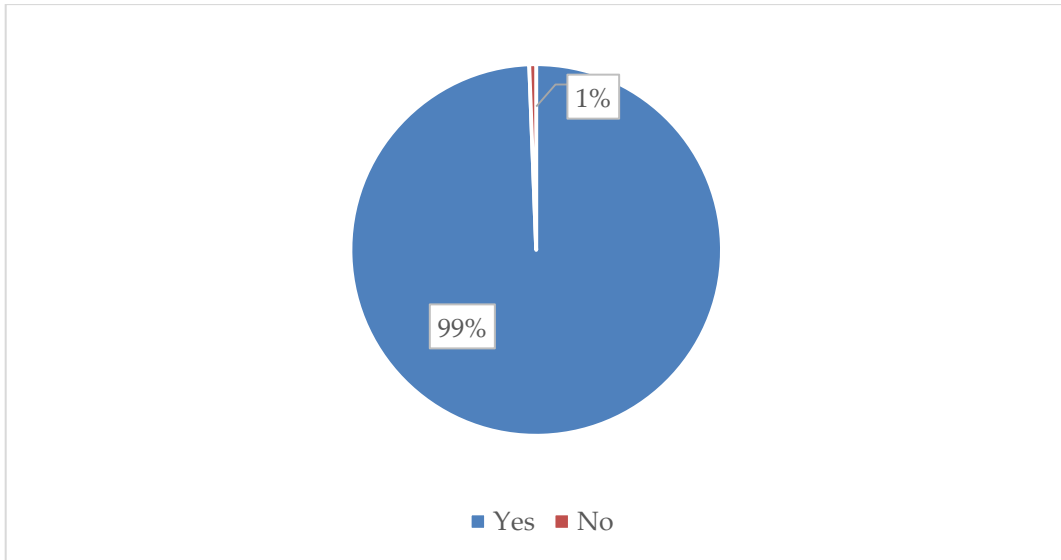


Figure 8 – Brand Familiarity Distribution

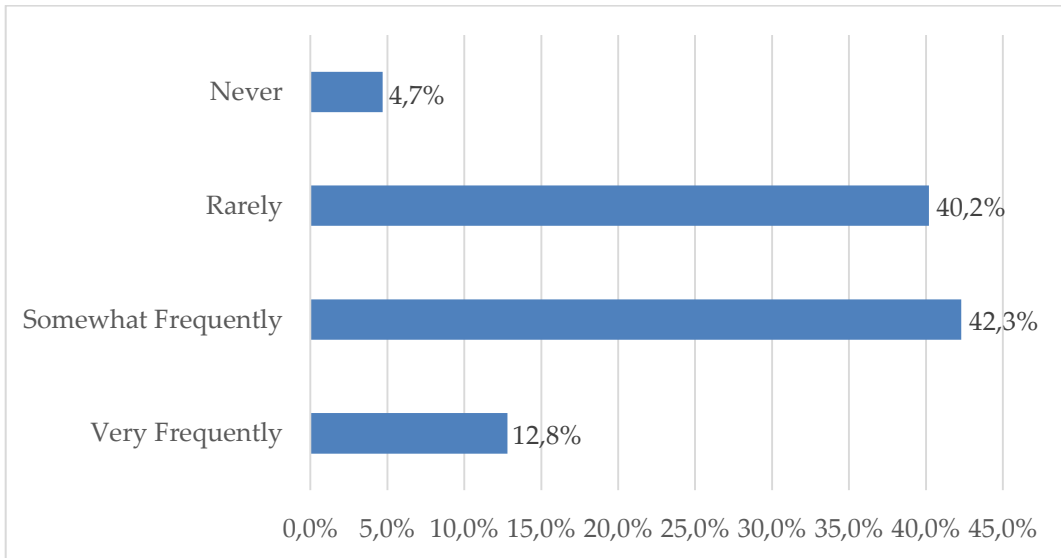


Figure 9 – Zara Purchase Frequency Distribution

4.1.3. Outliers

An outlier univariate analysis has been conducted, in order to guarantee a better data quality. For this tests, each variable has been analysed separately, to identify possible extreme values or anomalies. No univariate outliers have been identified for any of the variables under study.

4.1.4. Data Reliability

Before testing the hypothesis, we measured the internal consistency, also known as reliability, of the scales used, by calculating the Cronbach Alpha developed by Lee Cronbach (1951). Following the classification of Hill and Hill (2012), we can conclude that all scales are excellent, as they all presented a value higher than 0.9, confirming the reliability of all scales. Results for each scale can be found on table 12, while table 13 presents the classification used by Hill and Hill (2012).

Scales	Dimensions	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Credibility	Attractiveness	5	0.983
	Expertise	5	0.982
	Trustworthiness	5	0.992
Attitude	Brand Attitude	5	0.961
	Collaboration Attitude	5	0.981
Purchase Intention		3	0.986

Table 12 – Scales' Reliability Test. Source: SPSS Output

Cronbach's Alpha	Below 0.6	Between 0.6 – 0.7	Between 0.7 – 0.8	Between 0.8 – 0.9	Above 0.9
Classification	Unacceptable	Bad	Acceptable	Good	Excellent

Table 13 – Cronbach's Alpha Classification according to Hill & Hill (2012)

4.1.5. Descriptive Statistics

As we can see in Table 14, on average, the dimensions of credibility had moderate levels, since they were evaluated on scales from 1 to 7. The mean of the variable influencer perceived attractiveness was 3.656 (SD = 1.906), of perceived expertise 3.531 (SD = 1.684) and of perceived trustworthiness 3.491 (SD = 1.738). Average attitude towards the endorsed brand Zara was high (M = 5.303, SD =

1.213), considering it was also measured through a scale from 1 to 7. The attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration has a mean value of 4.299 and a standard deviation of 1.655 (also measured through a scale from 1 to 7). Purchase intention, which was measured through a scale ranging from 1 to 7, has a mean of 3.248 and a standard deviation of 1.829. This analysis is presented in table 14.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attractiveness	3,656	1,906
Expertise	3,531	1,684
Trustworthiness	3,491	1,738
Attitude towards brand	5,303	1,213
Attitude towards collaboration	4,299	1,655
Purchase intention	3,248	1,829

Table 14 – Descriptive Statistics. Source: SPSS Output

4.1.5.1. Descriptive Statistics: Sex Comparison

Overall, the mean for each variable under study is higher for the females than for males. Regarding the standard deviation, the opposite happens, as it is higher for the male gender than for the female gender for almost every variable, except for influencer perceived attractiveness and purchase intention of the product promoted through the influencer-brand collaboration.

The highest mean difference, in absolute values, for female and male sex is 0.890 (SD diff = 0.128) for the attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration, followed by the mean difference of the attractiveness of the influencer of 0.746 (SD diff = 0.211). For the other four variables, the expertise mean difference is 0.299 (SD diff = 0.139), trustworthiness 0.488 (SD diff = 0.102), attitude towards the brand is 0.394 (SD diff = 0.092), and finally purchase intention of the product endorsed by the influencer is 0.538 (SD diff = 0.015). This detailed information can be found on tables 15 and 16.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attractiveness	3,656	1,906
Female	3,981	1,961
Male	3,235	1,750
Expertise	3,531	1,684
Female	3,661	1,618
Male	3,362	1,757
Trustworthiness	3,491	1,738
Female	3,703	1,678
Male	3,215	1,780
Attitude towards brand	5,303	1,213
Female	5,475	1,158
Male	5,081	1,250
Attitude towards collaboration	4,299	1,655
Female	4,687	1,540
Male	3,797	1,668
Purchase intention	3,248	1,829
Female	3,482	1,819
Male	2,944	1,804

Table 15 – Descriptive Statistics by Respondent’s Gender. Source: SPSS Output

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attractiveness	0,746	0,211
Expertise	0,299	0,139
Trustworthiness	0,488	0,102
Attitude towards brand	0,394	0,092
Attitude towards collaboration	0,890	0,128
Purchase intention	0,538	0,015

Table 16 – Descriptive Statistics Gender Differences. Source: SPSS Output

4.1.6. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation is a statistical method used to measure the relationship between two variables. This measurement ranges between -1, which means a strong negative relation, and 1, which means a strong positive relation.

For this study, we conducted the Pearson correlation test to measure the relationship between the independent variables (attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness and attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration) and the dependent variable (purchase intention of the product endorsed by the influencer).

Results of the test show that all correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variable are positive and significant. The strongest positive correlation happens between purchase intention and attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration (0.748), followed by the credibility dimensions: trustworthiness (0.742), expertise (0.707) and lastly attractiveness (0.653). We also analysed the correlation between attitude towards the brand Zara and purchase intention of the product linked with the influencer-brand collaboration and it has a value of 0.303. Moreover, we analysed the correlation between the frequency of purchase of a Zara product and the intention to purchase the product promoted in the collaboration, and it has a value of 0.206. This analysis is presented in table 17.

	Purchase Intention	P-value
Attractiveness	0,653	0,000
Expertise	0,707	0,000
Trustworthiness	0,742	0,000
Attitude towards brand	0,303	0,000
Attitude towards collaboration	0,748	0,000
Frequency of purchase	0,206	0,000
Purchase intention	1	——

Table 17 – Correlation Analysis. Source: SPSS Output

4.2. In-depth Analysis

We used a linear regression on SPSS to analyse the direct effects of the credibility dimensions on the purchase intention of the product linked with the influencer-brand collaboration. Influencer perceived attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness are the predicting variables and our outcome variable is purchase intention of the product linked with the influencer-brand collaboration.

According to the results, our model is statistically significant, and 67% of the variance in purchase intention of the product endorsed by the influencer is explained by the variance in the independent variables ($R^2 = 0.665$) (see Table 18). This can be considered as a very high percentage.

F	R Square	P-value
F (3; 357) = 234,483	0,665	0,000

Table 18 – Model Analysis. Source: SPSS Output

Furthermore, all independent variables (influencer perceived attractiveness, perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness) have a significant and positive impact on purchase intention of the product promoted in the influencer-

brand collaboration, thus these variables are good predictors of the dependent variable.

Based on the results found in table 19, we can conclude that influencer perceived trustworthiness is the credibility dimension with the biggest impact on the purchase intention of the product endorsed by the influencer, followed by influencer perceived attractiveness, which also has a positive impact. Expertise is the credibility dimension with the lowest impact, yet its effect on purchase intention is still positive and significant.

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Attractiveness	0,290	0,039	0,302	7,481	0,000
Expertise	0,199	0,054	0,183	3,657	0,000
Trustworthiness	0,480	0,047	0,456	10,250	0,000

Table 19 – Effect of Independent Variables on Dependent Variable. Source: SPSS Output

4.2.1. In-depth Analysis: Moderated Mediation

To analyse the previously proposed hypotheses, SPSS Macros called PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) has been used to conduct a moderated mediation analysis. For this model, the variables influencer attractiveness, influencer expertise and influencer trustworthiness were entered as the independent variables (X), and purchase intention towards the influencer-brand collaboration product as the dependent variable (Y). Attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration was entered as the mediator (M). A path analysis has been conducted, and the path coefficients and significance levels have been considered.

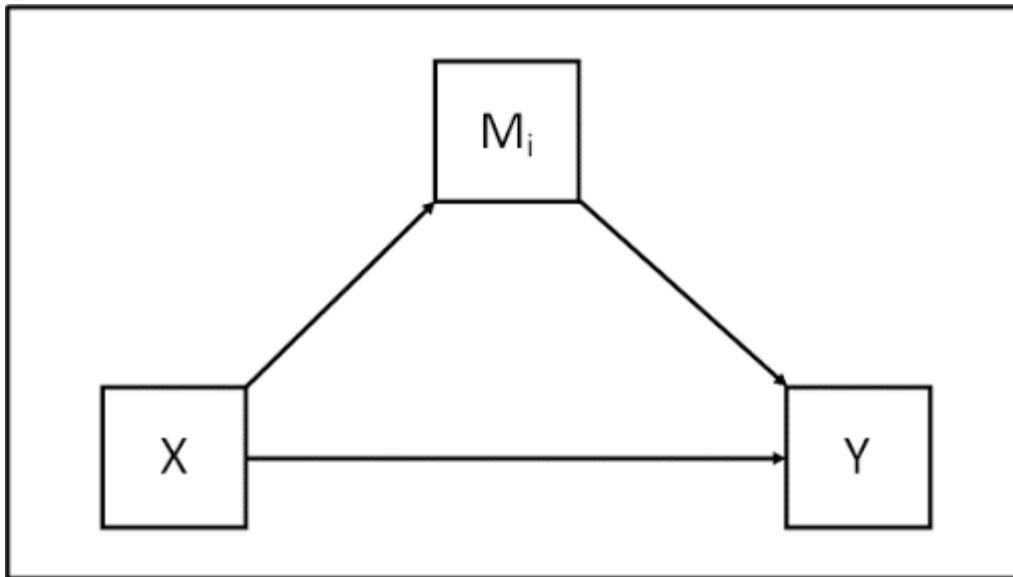


Figure 10 – Conceptual Diagram

According to the results, our model is statistically significant, and 50% of the variance in the attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration is explained by the variance in the independent variables ($R^2 = 0.495$, $p < 0.001$).

Regarding the relationship between influencer attractiveness and attitude towards the collaboration ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0.001$), results lead us to accept H1. Furthermore, the results of the relationship between influencer expertise and attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration ($\beta = 0.150$, $p < 0.05$) allow us to accept H2. In respect to the link between influencer trustworthiness and attitude towards the collaboration ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.001$), results lead us to accept H3. This analysis is presented in tables 20 and 22.

Moreover, with respect to the credibility dimensions, influencer perceived trustworthiness has the strongest relationship with consumer attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration, followed by influencer perceived attractiveness and, lastly, by influencer perceived expertise. This is the credibility dimension with the weakest relation with attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration, yet this relationship is still positive and significant.

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Attractiveness	0,216	0,043	0,249	5,016	0,000
Expertise	0,148	0,061	0,150	2,438	0,015
Trustworthiness	0,391	0,052	0,411	7,525	0,000

Table 20 – Path Analysis: Attitude towards Collaboration. Source: SPSS Output

Furthermore, results show that 73% of the variance in purchase intention of the product promoted in the influencer-brand collaboration is explained by the model ($R^2 = 0,726$, $p < 0.001$).

According to the results, consumer attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration has a significant impact on their purchase intention of the product promoted in the influencer-brand collaboration ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.001$), thus H4 has been supported (see Tables 21 and 22). Regarding the credibility dimensions attractiveness ($\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$), expertise ($\beta = 0.131$, $p < 0.05$) and trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.314$, $p < 0.001$), each has a positive and significant impact as well, on the variable attitude towards the collaboration in the model (see Table 21).

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Attractiveness	0,208	0,036	0,216	5,701	0,000
Expertise	0,143	0,050	0,131	2,867	0,004
Trustworthiness	0,330	0,046	0,314	7,223	0,000
Attitude towards collaboration	0,383	0,043	0,346	8,825	0,000

Table 21 – Path Analysis: Purchase Intention towards Collaboration. Source: SPSS Output

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients	P-value
H1. Attractiveness → Attitude towards collaboration	0,249	0,000
H2. Expertise → Attitude towards collaboration	0,150	0,015
H3. Trustworthiness → Attitude towards collaboration	0,411	0,000
H4. Attitude towards collaboration → Purchase Intention towards collaboration	0,346	0,000

Table 22 – Structural Model: Path Coefficients. Source: SPSS Output

Moreover, results show that attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration is a mediator of the relationships between each of the independent variables (influencer attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) and the dependent variable (purchase intention of the product promoted in the influencer-brand collaboration), as our confidence intervals do not contain zeros (see Table 23).

	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Attractiveness	0,082	0,020	0,047	0,124
Expertise	0,057	0,024	0,013	0,107
Trustworthiness	0,150	0,026	0,101	0,205

Table 23 – Indirect Effect of IV's on DV. Source: SPSS Output

Discussion

This study analysed how each dimension of influencer credibility affects attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration and purchase intention of the product promoted in the collaboration. Furthermore, we also studied the mediating effect of consumer attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration in the relationship between influencer perceived attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness and consumer purchase intention of the product promoted in the influencer-brand collaboration. The theoretical contributions and managerial implications of our research are presented in the following sections.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

Results show that brands and managers should consider all three dimensions of influencer credibility when considering to implement an influencer marketing campaign through Instagram, as all the dimensions have a significant effect on consumer responses towards the influencer-brand collaboration. Furthermore, results show that trustworthiness is the most relevant credibility dimension, and, thus, this should be the first characteristic to be considered by brand managers, followed by attractiveness, and, lastly, by the influencer expertise.

First, regarding influencer perceived attractiveness, we conclude that a more attractive influencer will provide better outcomes in terms of consumers' attitudes towards the collaboration. As previously mentioned, attractiveness concerns consumers' perceptions of physical attractiveness, respect and similarity (Alsmadi, 2006; Ohanian, 1990), which lead to a better acceptance of the advertised message (Choi & Rifon, 2007). These findings are consistent with previous literature (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Till & Busler, 2000; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017; Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). Results also show that

women tend to perceive female influencers as more attractive, than man in respect to male influencers. Hence, the relevance of attractiveness might be even higher when brands are targeting female consumers.

Second, the analysis of the impact of the influencer perceived level of expertise, leads us to conclude that, although this is not the dimension that causes the strongest effect on consumer attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration, it still has a significant and positive impact. Therefore, the more expert the influencer is perceived, the better the attitude towards the collaboration will be. In contrast to these results, McGuire (1985) suggested that expertise was indeed the most significant attribute. Yet, the study of Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020) suggested similar results to our study. Thus, the findings of previous studies were not consensual, and this research adds to the literature by underlining that, despite being important, influencer expertise is not the determinant dimension of credibility.

Third, this study shows that influencer perceived trustworthiness is the credibility dimension with the highest positive impact on consumer attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration. Therefore, the more trustworthy the influencer is perceived, the better the attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration will be. Thus, trustworthiness should be the first dimension to be taken in consideration by brand managers' when choosing an influencer for an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram. These findings are consistent with existing literature (Abert et al., 2019; Amos et al., 2008; Homer & Kahle 1990; Virkkunen & Norhio, 2019; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017; Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020), and confirm the relevance of perceived trustworthiness for Portuguese consumers.

Fourth, brand attitude has been suggested in prior studies as a variable with high, significant and positive impact on intention to purchase a brand product (Amos et al., 2008; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Singh & Banerjee, 2018; Wang &

Scheinbaum, 2017; Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). Results show that consumer attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration has a very significant and positive impact on purchase intention of the product promoted in the collaboration. These findings show how important it is to enhance brand attitude in order to increase purchase intention. In this case, attitude should be enhanced by working on the influencer credibility dimensions.

Moreover, results also show that females have a better attitude towards the (same sex) influencer-brand collaboration when compared to males. These findings are consistent with previous research, which shows that ads featuring female endorsers are evaluated more favourably than ads featuring male endorsers (Klaus & Bailey, 2008). Therefore, this study complements previous research by suggesting that influencer marketing campaigns should be more appealing to the female target than to the male target.

Our study also proves itself relevant in the context of the social network Instagram, as little empirical research focuses on this platform. The study of Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020), although presenting similar findings in regards of the most influential dimension being influencer trustworthiness, has selected another major platform for influencer marketing, namely Facebook, as the social network of usage.

While previous research focused on different variables to measure how influencer credibility impacts the success of the influencer marketing campaign, such as brand image, brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand awareness, price premium, advertisement attitude and customer-based brand equity (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Singh & Banerjee, 2018; Spry et al., 2011; Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020), our study focused on purchase intention through the mediating effect of attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration, providing a different perspective on influencer marketing success.

5.2. Managerial Implications

This study proves itself relevant, from a managerial perspective, as little empirical research has examined influencers' success requirements. Previous research suggests that the most important requirements for social influencers are authenticity, honesty and trust (Virkkunen & Norhio, 2019), continuity, variation and competence development (Abert et al., 2019). Credibility has also been acknowledged as a success requirement (Childers et al., 2019) and a key element in building a positive brand attitude (Amos et al., 2008; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017; Singh & Banerjee, 2018). Our study provides more insight on this subject.

Thus, our findings suggest that influencer credibility plays a major role in consumer attitude towards the collaboration and purchase intention of the product being promoted in that same collaboration. More precisely, influencer trustworthiness is the dimension to play closer attention to when selecting an influencer for an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram, as our research suggests it is indeed the most influential and crucial dimension. Hence, when choosing the most appropriate influencer for an influencer marketing campaign, brand managers should prioritize trustworthiness.

Furthermore, results show that influencer attractiveness, although not as influential as influencer trustworthiness, is still an attribute with high importance in regards to both attitude towards the collaboration and purchase intention, and should, therefore, be taken into consideration when selecting the right influencer for an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram. Thirdly, brand managers should also choose an influencer based on his/her expertise, yet this is not a primary attribute to take into account, as it is the least significant dimension.

Findings also show that, in general, females evaluate (same sex) influencer attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness higher than males, and tend to have a better attitude towards the influencer-brand collaboration. Thus, results

indicate that brands should be more successful if they use a female influencer in a marketing campaign on Instagram targeting female consumers, rather than if they select a male influencer for a campaign which targets male consumers. Hence, if brands choose a trustworthy, attractive and expert (by this order) female influencer, they will be able to favourably affect relevant female consumer responses towards the brand. These findings are consistent with previous research on the effect of female attractiveness on consumer purchase intention (Caballero & Solomon, 1984; Liu & Brook, 2011).

Limitations and future research

Despite the findings obtained, this study is not without limitations. The major limitation of this study is that a non-probability sampling technique has been used, precisely a convenience sampling, which is not considered appropriate to select a significant sample to represent the population (Malhotra & Birks, 2008, p.411). Thus, data collection should be more extensive, to select a larger and wider sample, to better represent the population. Another limitation concerning data collection is that data were only collected in Portugal, mainly in the north part of the country, therefore, future studies should include a wider cultural range, to better characterise the population under study.

Another major limitation of this study is the use of fictional influencers, rather than real life influencers. Although using a fictional endorser brings a great advantage with respect to experimental control (Till & Busler, 2000), it is still a limitation, as studies with real influencers may reveal that other elements, such as consumers' preferences, likability and familiarity towards the endorser, can have an impact on consumer attitude towards the collaboration and on their purchase intention.

The fact that this study focused on Instagram as the only social network is another limitation. Previous research suggests that Twitter and Facebook (and even YouTube) are other important and effective platforms for social media and/or influencer marketing (Levin, 2019; Lin et al., 2018). Thus, future research should consider different social media networks.

This study focused on fashion category, which is seen as feminine and whose influencers are mostly female (Lieven et al., 2015), this might have influenced the results regarding sex differences, found mostly in respect to perceived influencer attractiveness and attitude towards the collaboration. Thus, future studies should focus on different product categories to complement the results of this research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Pretest

O presente questionário insere-se no Trabalho Final de Mestrado do Mestrado de Marketing da Católica Porto Business School e pretende avaliar a atratividade de um conjunto de potenciais influencers.

O questionário é anónimo e as suas respostas serão tratadas de forma confidencial.

O seu preenchimento demora cerca de 2 minutos.

Desde já agradecemos a sua disponibilidade para participar!

Secção 1

1. Idade ____

2. Sexo

- Feminino
- Masculino

Secção 2

3. Considero este(a) influencer...

Por favor indique o seu grau de concordância com as características que se seguem. Utilize a escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 significa "discordo totalmente" e 7 "concordo totalmente"

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Atraente							
Requintado(a)							
Bonito(a)							
Elegante							
Sensual							

Stimuli



Figure 11 – Pretest Stimuli Pictures

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

Impacto da Credibilidade do Influencer na Intenção de Compra

O presente questionário insere-se no Trabalho Final de Mestrado em Marketing da Católica Porto Business School e tem como objetivo perceber o impacto da credibilidade dos influencers nas marcas.

O seu preenchimento demora cerca de 5 minutos.

Todas as respostas são anónimas e serão tratadas de forma confidencial.

Desde já agradecemos a sua disponibilidade para participar!

Secção 1

1. Sexo

- Feminino
- Masculino

Secção 2

Neste grupo de perguntas irão ser colocadas questões relativas à marca Zara.

2. Conhece a marca Zara?

- Sim
- Não

3. Com que frequência compra produtos da Zara?

- Nunca
- Raramente
- Com alguma frequência
- Muito frequentemente

4. Considero que a Zara é uma marca:

Por favor indique o seu grau de concordância com as afirmações que se seguem, tendo em conta os sentimentos/emoções que a marca Zara lhe provoca.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Má								Boa
Negativa								Positiva
Desfavorável								Favorável
Desagradável								Agradável
Desinteressante								Interessante

Secção 3

A Zara pretende associar-se a um(a) influencer para várias campanhas através do Instagram. Por favor, observe com atenção o perfil abaixo apresentado e responda às questões que se seguem.

Descrição do(a) influencer

Fotografia do(a) influencer

5. Considero o(a) influencer (nome)...

Por favor indique o seu grau de concordância com as características que se seguem. Utilize uma escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 significa "discordo totalmente" e 7 "concordo totalmente"

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Atraente							
Requintado(a)							
Bonito(a)							
Elegante							
Sensual							

6. Tendo em conta a categoria de produto moda, considero o(a) influencer (nome)...

Por favor indique o seu grau de concordância com as características que se seguem. Utilize uma escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 significa "discordo totalmente" e 7 "concordo totalmente"

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Especialista							
Experiente							
Com conhecimento							
Qualificado(a)							
Competente							

7. Considero o(a) influencer (nome)...

Por favor indique o seu grau de concordância com as características que se seguem. Utilize uma escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 significa "discordo totalmente" e 7 "concordo totalmente"

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Confiável							
Honesto(a)							
Fidedigno(a)							
Sincero(a)							
Credível							

8. Considero que a colaboração entre a Zara e o(a) influencer (nome) seria:

Por favor indique o seu grau de concordância com as afirmações que se seguem, tendo em conta os sentimentos/emoções que a colaboração entre a marca Zara e o(a) influencer (nome) lhe provocaria.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Má								Boa
Negativa								Positiva
Desfavorável								Favorável
Desagradável								Agradável
Desinteressante								Interessante

9. Indique em que medida concorda com as seguintes afirmações tendo em conta uma possível colaboração entre a Zara e o(a) influencer (nome).

Utilize uma escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 significa "discordo totalmente" e 7 "concordo totalmente"

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Possivelmente, compraria um produto da Zara promovido pelo(a) influencer (nome)							
É provável que eu comprasse um produto da Zara promovido pelo(a) influencer (nome)							
Estaria disposto(a) a comprar um produto da Zara promovido pelo(a) influencer (nome)							

Secção 4

10. Idade ____

11. Escolaridade

- Ensino Básico
- Ensino Secundário
- Licenciatura
- Pós-Graduação/Mestrado
- Outro ____

12. Distrito ____

13. Com que frequência utiliza o Instagram?

- Nunca
- Raramente
- Semanalmente
- Diariamente
- Mais do que uma vez por dia

14. Quantos influencers, em média, segue no Instagram?

- Nenhum
- Entre 1 e 10
- Entre 10 e 20
- Entre 20 e 50
- Mais de 50

Questionnaire Profiles



Profile 1

Her name is Ana and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 2

His name is André and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 3

Her name is Beatriz and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 4

His name is Bruno and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 5

Her name is Catarina and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. Her reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.



Profile 6

His name is Carlos and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. His reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.



Profile 7

Her name is Diana and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. Her reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.



Profile 8

His name is Diogo and has a keen interest for fashion, having taken a fashion master degree at London College of Fashion, a prestige school in the United Kingdom. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. His reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.



Profile 9

Her name is Ema and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 10

His name is Eduardo and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 11

Her name is Flora and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 12

His name is Fábio and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Is sincere and honest, and always gives a real review of products, whether it's negative or positive, to provide followers with truthful information.



Profile 13

Her name is Gabriela and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. Her reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.



Profile 14

His name is Gonçalo and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. His reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.



Profile 15

Her name is Helena and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. Her reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.



Profile 16

His name is Hugo and has a keen interest for computers and videogames, having studied computer science in college. Tends to overly compliment the product or brand, never referring a single negative comment. His reviews seem bias to please the brands and obtain as many products as possible.

Appendix 3 - SPSS Output

Pretest

Pairwise Comparisons - Female

Measure: Attractiveness

(I) Stimuli	(J) Stimuli	Mean Difference			95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
		(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	1,506*	,134	,000	1,129	1,883
	3	-2,365*	,165	,000	-2,828	-1,901
	4	2,282*	,166	,000	1,816	2,749
2	1	-1,506*	,134	,000	-1,883	-1,129
	3	-3,871*	,174	,000	-4,360	-3,381
	4	,776*	,112	,000	,463	1,090
3	1	2,365*	,165	,000	1,901	2,828
	2	3,871*	,174	,000	3,381	4,360
	4	4,647*	,213	,000	4,048	5,246
4	1	-2,282*	,166	,000	-2,749	-1,816
	2	-,776*	,112	,000	-1,090	-,463
	3	-4,647*	,213	,000	-5,246	-4,048

Notes: Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the ,05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

* Correlation significant, $p < 0,05$

Table 24 – Stimuli Comparison – Female Sex. Source: SPSS Output

Pairwise Comparisons - Male

Measure: Attractiveness

(I) Stimuli	(J) Stimuli	Mean Difference			95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
		(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
5	6	3,368*	,272	,000	2,598	4,137
	7	,226	,172	1,000	-,261	,712
	8	3,432*	,261	,000	2,696	4,169
6	5	-3,368*	,272	,000	-4,137	-2,598
	7	-3,142*	,309	,000	-4,014	-2,270
	8	,065	,130	1,000	-,304	,433
7	5	-,226	,172	1,000	-,712	,261
	6	3,142*	,309	,000	2,270	4,014
	8	3,206*	,293	,000	2,378	4,035
8	5	-3,432*	,261	,000	-4,169	-2,696
	6	-,065	,130	1,000	-,433	,304
	7	-3,206*	,293	,000	-4,035	-2,378

Notes: Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the ,05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

Correlation significant, $p < 0,05$

Table 25 – Stimuli Comparison – Male Sex. Source: SPSS Output

Pearson Correlation

	Attract	Expert	Trust towards brand	Attitude towards brand	Attitude Collaboration	Frequency Purchase	Purchase Intention
Attract	1,000	0,646*	0,509*	0,203*	0,555*	0,183*	0,653*
Expert	0,646*	1,000	0,720*	0,312*	0,607*	0,220*	0,707*
Trust	0,509*	0,720*	1,000	0,261*	0,646*	0,140*	0,742*
Attitude towards brand	0,203*	0,312*	0,261*	1,000	0,337*	0,536*	0,303*
Attitude Collaboration	0,555*	0,607*	0,646*	0,337*	1,000	0,162*	0,748*
Frequency Purchase	0,183*	0,220*	0,140*	0,536*	0,162*	1,000	0,206*
Purchase Intention	0,653*	0,707*	0,742*	0,303*	0,748*	0,206*	1,000

* p-value < 0.05

Table 26 – Independent and Dependent Variables Correlations. Source: SPSS Output