How can influencer marketing be harmful to brands?

Auteur : Loyen, Jeanne
Promoteur(s) : Dessart, Laurence
Faculté : HEC-Ecole de gestion de l'Université de Liège
Diplôme : Master en sciences de gestion, à finalité spécialisée en international strategic marketing
Année académique : 2022-2023
URI/URL : http://hdl.handle.net/2268.2/18812

HOW CAN INFLUENCER MARKETING BE HARMFUL TO BRANDS?

Jury:

Supervisor:

Laurence DESSART

Reader:

Sophie Ismail

Master thesis by

Jeanne LOYEN

For a Master's degree in

Management specialising in

International Strategic Marketing

Academic year 2022/2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed in any way to the completion of this thesis.

Firstly, I would particularly like to thank my supervisor, Laurence Dessart, for her guidance, support and advice throughout this research project. Her availability, expertise and dedication have been invaluable assets, and I am deeply grateful to have been able to benefit from her supervision throughout the year.

Secondly, I would also like to express my warmest thanks to Sophie Ismail, my reader, who generously donated her time to read and assess this work. Her enlightened comments and constructive suggestions greatly contributed to the improvement of this thesis.

Thirdly, I thank all the respondents who agreed to share their time and knowledge during the interviews conducted for this study. Their participation was essential in enriching the results of my research and providing valuable insights into the subject of influencer marketing.

Fourthly, I would like to thank all the people who, directly or indirectly, contributed to the completion of this thesis. In particular, I would like to thank my friends, Native Davignon and Simon Litt for their invaluable advice. Their support and contributions have greatly enriched this research and played a key role in its completion.

Finally, I would also like to express my gratitude to my family and friends for their unfailing support throughout my academic journey. Their encouragement and patience have been a source of motivation and comfort throughout this adventure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

1 CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

"This post is sponsored" or "Get a discount with my promotional code" are sentences that have been quite common on social medias in recent years. Social media influencers (SMIs) are quickly becoming ubiquitous on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and more. This phenomenon was made possible through the invention of WEB 2.0, which introduced new technologies that have enabled companies to communicate more effectively, particularly through social media channels. The rapid dissemination, sharing and exchange of information that takes place through these platforms has enabled social media content to be distributed at an unprecedented pace (Berthon et al, 2012).

The evolution of Internet has also impacted the traditional forms of communication such as newspapers, television and radio that are becoming a small portion of the promotional resources used by a brand, to the benefit of more digitalized communication on social medias (Pütter, 2017). Indeed, "*social media helps firms to build brand loyalty through networking, conversation, and community building*" (McKee, 2010). From now on, every social medias' user represents a potential customer for a brand promoting its products or services on these platforms. As a result, it became the ideal place for brands to promote their offer, whether through their own networks, targeted advertising or third parties, such as social media influencers.

Initially, SMIs were ordinary people, regularly posting content on their personal social medias, about various subjects such as fashion, sport, tourism, ... Over time, these individuals gained popularity among their followers and finally reached a stage where their activities on these networks became a full-time job. For several years, this profession has been the object of much criticism, questioning its legitimacy. Indeed, it differs in many aspects from more ordinary professions, as there are, a priori, no working hours, no offices, no boss, no fixed salary. Although this profession is very recent, those who have succeeded in standing out from the crowd on social medias are making huge amounts of money. In 2021, Intellifluence, an influencer marketing platform, conducted a study of 1249 content creators in the US, Canada and UK (Intellifluence, 2021). It found that a SMI with more than 90,000 followers on Instagram expects to be paid more than $1,200 per sponsored post. At first glance, these expectations may seem staggering. However, considering that influencer marketing brings a level of credibility that is difficult to achieve through traditional means of communication, or that some SMIs have such a large community on their networks that they can reach the same number of people as a TV channel, these demands become less inconceivable (Marwick, 2015; Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

Influencer marketing is so ubiquitous that it is becoming difficult for users to scroll social medias without encountering a sponsored post (Jarrar et al., 2020). Indeed, a study held by Rakuten Marketing in 2019 shows that 61% of individuals connect to a SMI once a day and even more for 31% of the respondents. It is therefore not surprising that social medias are the most influential form of online communication (Jayasinghe, 2021). Moreover, the size of the global influencer marketing market continues to grow, and brands are constantly allocating resources to this type of communication. According to a study by Influencer Marketing Hub, a media company specialising in social medias and influencer marketing, the size of the global market will reach $21.1 billion by 2023, up from $1.7 billion in 2016. In other words, the influencer community has enjoyed a meteoric growth of 1141% in the last 7 years, which can be explain by the fact that 83% of brand marketers find this type of marketing effective (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022).

However, although influencer marketing has many benefits for brands, there are doubts about this form of advertising. In fact, 34% of consumers do not trust a SMI knowing the latter has been paid to rent leases about a product or a service (Rakuten Marketing, 2019). Furthermore, the aim of influencer marketing is to associate a brand's image with an individual that has a huge community of followers on social medias. However, in today's world, bad buzz on the Internet is very common and the information flows very quickly. A brand is never safe from having its SMI involved in a scandal, which will immediately impact the brand's image. The latter is just one of many cases that this research aims to explore and analyse. Hence, marketers must acknowledge the potential risks of influencer marketing and handle it with care. Conducting an in-depth analysis of the negative aspects of influencer marketing can contribute in professionalizing this way of communication and safeguarding all involved parties (Wellman et al. 2020).

1.2 Research motivations

From a managerial point of view, it is in managers' best interests to understand and be aware of the dangers of influencer marketing. Although this technique is widely used by brands as part of their communications strategy, whether to promote their products or services to target audiences, increase sales, brand awareness or visibility, influencer marketing has its limits. At a time when social medias occupy a major place in the lives of many consumers, effective understanding and management of influencer marketing is essential for companies, so as to reduce the risks associated with an unsuccessful marketing campaign. Indeed, the dangers associated with influencer marketing are numerous and can quickly damage a brand, whether in relation to its image, its credibility or its relationship with its consumers (Lou & Yuan, 2018; Jarrar et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2022).

From a theoretical point of view, this study may be beneficial to many scholars. Although influencer marketing is a topic increasingly addressed in the scientific literature, and many articles deal with the benefits of this promotional technique (e.g., Moulard et al., 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Leung et al., 2022), very few address the risks associated with it. Consequently, it is pertinent to study the various dangers imposed by influencer marketing for brands.

1.3 Problem statement

This research aims to provide answers to the following question:

« How can influencer marketing be harmful to brands? »

In addition to this question, other sub-questions will also be addressed:
  (1) What do consumers think of this type of marketing?
  (2) Do consumers already have a negative buying experience?
  (3) How influencer marketing affects brand image negatively?
  (4) How influencer marketing affects brand awareness negatively?
  (5) How influencer marketing affects consumer behaviour negatively?
  (6) Do marketing experts see any dangers in influencer marketing?
  (7) What do marketing experts think about the world of influencer marketing?
  (8) What do social media influencers think about the world of influencer marketing?
  (9) How to make influencer marketing last?

1.4   Contributions

Despite the growing importance of influencer marketing, very little research has been carried out to explore the risks it imposes. This lack of knowledge provides an opportunity to analyse the dangers of influencer marketing for brands. The present research aims to fill this gap, making a significant contribution to our understanding of the subject.

One of the main contributions of this study is to identify and describe the various risks associated with influencer marketing for brands. By analysing in detail current practices, the strategies adopted by brands, and the behaviours of SMIs and consumers, the research will highlight the potential risks that can undermine the success of an influencer marketing campaign. This in-depth analysis will provide a better understanding of the emerging issues and challenges facing brands.

Secondly, another key contribution of this research work lies in analysing the impact of influencer marketing on consumers. By studying their past feelings and experiences, this research will highlight the potential consequences on purchasing behaviour, consumer attitudes and brand perception. Understanding how consumers react to influencer marketing campaigns will enable marketers to adapt their strategy to maintain customer satisfaction and good customer relations.

Finally, particular attention has been paid to the perspective of the SMIs themselves. This research contributes to a better understanding of how SMIs interact with brands, the pressures they may encounter and the challenges they have to overcome.

As a result, this work will provide a better understanding of the complex dynamics that can exist between brands, SMIs and their followers, and will provide valuable information and unique perspectives to further analysis of the dangers of influencer marketing.

1.5   Approach

This research paper is structured in six chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the introduction, covering the context, the motivations for this research, the problem statement and the contributions made by this work. Then, the second chapter covers the literature review, dealing with the various concepts related to social medias, influencer marketing, its advantages and limitations, and finally, the legal aspects related to this promotional technique. The third chapter deals with the research design, which will be explained and justified, along with the data collection method and technique used. Furthermore, the results of the study will be presented and discussed in the fourth chapter. Subsequently, the fifth chapter is devoted to a discussion of the results and their implications. Finally, the sixth and last chapter provides a conclusion, summarizing the results of this research and the recommendations, as well as its implications from a managerial point of view, the possible limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concepts related to social media

2.1.1 Social media marketing

Kohli, Suri, and Kapoor (2014) define social media as a *"consumer-generated media that covers a wide variety of new sources of online information, created and used by consumers intent on sharing information with others regarding any topic of interest"* (Kohli et al., 2014, p. 1).

Social medias not only offer a vast amount of information and knowledge, but also provide users with the ability to generate their own content, distinguishing them from traditional media platforms where users were merely passive viewers (Berthon et al., 2012). Its high-speed communication, consumer-centric approach, and broad appeal have resulted in a staggering 88.14% penetration rate[1] in Belgium, which is expected to increase by 10% by 2027 (Statista, 2023). Furthermore, there are already 4.89 billion active users[2] worldwide and this number is projected to double within four years (Statista, 2023).

Social medias have thus become a valuable communication tool for brands due to their accessibility and potential to reach a wide audience (Brogan, 2010; Zarrella, 2010). Indeed, social media marketing is *"the process that empowers individuals to promote their websites, products, or services through online social channels and tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional channels"* (Weinberg, 2009, p. 3). In view of these developments, it has become necessary for a brand to communicate on social medias because, as Michael Pütter (2017) has shown, a company that is present on these platforms gains a competitive advantage over those that are not. Moreover, Pütter (2017) contends that advertising on social medias positively influences consumers' purchase intentions, highlighting the importance of how brands manage their social media presence to influence consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour.

2.1.2 User-generated content

Other phenomena have emerged following the development of WEB 2.0 and social medias, such as user-generated content (UGC), a marketing tool at the heart of the debate (Luca, 2015; Mayrhofer et al., 2020). In more concrete terms, *"UGC refers to media content created by members of the general public and includes any form of online content created, initiated, circulated, and consumed by users"* (Kim & Johnson, 2016, p. 98). User-generated content thus allows any user to produce, exchange, and share content with the public, greatly affecting the online media landscape and all online industries (Daugherty et al., 2008; Luca, 2015).

Luca (2015) differentiates two types of UGC stakeholders, namely, contributors who make content available, and consumers, who consume it. One of the particularities of UGC is that these stakeholders can wear two hats and be both contributors and consumers (Luca, 2015). This marketing tool deals with any topic such as health, politics, food, fashion and many others in various formats like videos, texts, photos, podcasts to name a few (Daugherty et al., 2008; Luca, 2015).

---

[1] This penetration rate represents the *"share of the total population who use a social network via any device at least once per month"* (Statista, 2023).

[2] Statista considers that an active user is an *"Internet user who use social network site via any device at least once per month"* (Statista, 2023).

Unlike influencer marketing, the individuals creating UGC are not paid professionals (Daugherty et al., 2008). However, UGC creators find other compensations, not monetary, but rather psychological, motivating them to produce content. Daugherty and al. (2008) explain that by creating content, these individuals feel a sense of gratification, self-esteem and belonging to their community. The researchers also note that it allows UGC creators to alleviate their insecurities and remorse about not producing content (Daugherty et al., 2008). Muntinga and al. (2011) also suggest that UGC creators who share information about certain brands do so in order to feel connected to the brand's image and awareness. In addition, non-monetary incentives, like badges, are also offered by platforms to reward active content creators (Luca, 2015). According to Luca (2015), these badges serve as a strong motivation for users to engage with others on online communities and maintain their status.

As mentioned above, UGC often includes branded content that may positively or negatively affect the brand being discussed (Smith et al., 2012). Moreover, an important aspect of UGC-promoted messages is their perceived reliability. As the author produces content on a voluntary basis and is not tied to the brand, UGC consumers have greater trust in user reviews. This results in the persuasion knowledge of viewers, defined as their ability to recognize a promotional and persuasive message and respond accordingly, being less triggered than when encountering a clearly sponsored message (Mayrhofer et al., 2020). Thus, viewers tend to react based on the depicted content, which could either benefit or harm the featured brand. On the positive side, if a UGC creator expresses fondness for a brand or a product, viewers will be swayed by the positive review, positively affecting their perception of the brand or the product and their intent to act accordingly. Consumers may form intentions or make compulsive purchases based on UGC, and it can impact engagement with the reviewed brand. On the negative side, dismissive reviews can harm the brand as it has no control over individuals posting negative comments on social media platforms (Kim & Johnson, 2016). In addition, brands may write favourable reviews of themselves to enhance image, visibility, and product promotion. Meanwhile, others may spread negative and potentially misleading information, not about themselves, but about their competitors to harm their reputation (Luca, 2015).

WEB 2.0 technologies have transformed consumers from media observers to creators. Communication has moved away from traditional methods to a more interactive approach where consumers play a central role (Daugherty et al., 2008). Brands must acknowledge this in their interactions and communication with customers. As a result, it is essential that brands track their online mentions. Despite not being able to control UGC, marketers can improve their audience targeting and boost consumer satisfaction through actions such as comparing themselves to competitors' online mentions and adjusting their strategy based on consumer opinions and needs (Kim & Johnson, 2016).

2.1.3   Electronic word of mouth

Before the arrival of the Internet and new media channels, consumers used to exchange their opinions on various products or services via traditional word of mouth (WOM). Indeed, this method, being one of the oldest means of exchanging information (Dellarocas, 2003), is defined by Arndt (1967) as *"oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as noncommercial, regarding a brand, a product or a service"* (Arndt, 1967, p. 5). With the advent of WEB 2.0, classic word of mouth has been transformed into electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Jalilvand et al., 2011), considered by Huete-Alcocer as *"the most influential informal media among consumers, businesses, and the population at large"* (2017, p. 1). Indeed, consumers can now, with the click of a mouse, disseminate or access opinions and recommendations about brands, products or services (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Concretely, the eWOM is defined by Hennig-Thurau et al. 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" (2004, p. 39). The electronic word-of-mouth is therefore in reality user-generated content, specifically linked to brands (Smith et al., 2012).

Given that content creation requires time and its creators receive no compensation, one might wonder their motivations. According to Fu et al. (2015), altruism is the primary source of motivation for eWom creators. These researchers noted that when purchasing experiences were positive, individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to share their opinion. Conversely, when there is a bad experience, they feel motivated by reciprocity to punish the person responsible (Fu et al., 2015). Moreover, Verma and Yadav (2021) discovered that eWom creators are driven by an inner desire to engage with others and uphold justice, as well as implicit desires such as improving their personal image or seeking financial gain.

One of the reasons for the reach of eWOM is that the messages transmitted through this channel are more considered and believed by consumers, who see it as more trustworthy. Indeed, the content is created by other consumers with no vested interest, and not by the brands themselves, which is the very principle of influencer marketing (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Brown et al., 2007; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; De Veirman et al., 2017). Moreover, eWOM allows, unlike the traditional WOM, to exchange and find information at different points in time and without defined geographical barriers (Jalilvand et al., 2011; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Verma & Yadav, 2021). This communication channel also makes it possible to communicate on intangible aspects and thus reduce the risks associated with the purchase of services such as, for example, tourism, the quality of which can only be assessed after the purchase (Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Verma & Yadav, 2021).

Electronic word of mouth is of great interest to brands for several reasons. Firstly, it has the capacity to generate positive attitudes towards the brand and its products, to foster consumers' purchase intention and behaviour, and also their loyalty (Gruen et al., 2006; Mayzlin & Chevalier, 2006). Additionally, it allows for a better understanding of consumers' perceptions and, based on this, a better response to their needs (Nieto et al., 2014). Another advantage of this communication channel is the fact that it can quickly reach a rather large audience, interested in this topic, and therefore, potentially part of the brand's target audience (Christodoulides et al., 2012).

However, eWOM also involves risks. Some studies have shown that consumers attach more importance to negative aspects than to positive ones (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Therefore, when an individual reads a review, the impact of these words will have a greater influence on their consumer behaviour if the review is negative. Indeed, it has been shown by Lee, Park and Han (2008) that a negative review will promote unfavourable consumer attitudes towards that product, which will in turn damage the brand's reputation and financial standing (Pfeffer et al., 2014). Furthermore, the speed of propagation on social medias or online communities is impressive, unlike the traditional WOM (Gupta & Harris, 2010). As a result, a bad comment written by a dissatisfied consumer can quickly damage a brand, considering the large number of people who may have been reached by the review.

The electronic word of mouth is both an opportunity and a threat for brands (Ariely, 2007), which need to pay special attention to it, especially as it is considered the most influential source of information regarding consumers' purchase decisions (Litvin et al., 2008; Jalilvand et al., 2011).

2.2 Influencer Marketing

2.2.1 Social media influencers

2.2.2.1 Definition of a social media influencer

Social medias users may see people promoting certain products or services on a daily basis on all types of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube or TikTok. These posts are most often accompanied by a promotional code encouraging users to make a purchase. These publications are authored by social media influencers who can be defined as *"a new type of independent third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media"* (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 1). It is worth mentioning that unlike celebrities such as actors, musicians, athletes and others, SMIs are initially ordinary people, who have made themselves known in one way or another on social medias and who have managed to build up a large audience around them (Lou & Yuan, 2018). These social media influencers are usually specialized in specific areas such as lifestyle, fitness, beauty, fashion, travel and many more. SMIs publish content on their platforms on a regular basis to share persuasive messages to their audience, which may be entertaining or informative (Lou & Yuan, 2018).

Certain conditions must be met for an individual to be defined as a SMI. Firstly, this individual must enjoy a certain notoriety on social medias, which is characterized by the number of followers, views, likes, shares and comments, ... Secondly, that person must have a significant media presence, persuasiveness and editorial credibility that will make them an opinion leader (Ouahi & Melghagh, 2020).

2.2.2.1 The different types of social media influencers

Social media influencers can be differentiated according to the number of subscribers they have, the rate of engagement they generate, defined as *"a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a social media focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers"* (Dolan et al. 2015, p. 5), the remuneration they charge, their area of expertise or their skills (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). In total, Campbell and Farrell (2020) have drawn up five categories of SMIs, classified in chronological order, depending on the size of their audience, namely: celebrity influencers, mega influencers, macro influencers, micro influencers and nano influencers. Each of these categories of SMIs has advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, the more subscribers a SMI has, the more they will be seen as an expert in their field. However, they will also be considered as less authentic and less accessible. As a result, marketers will need to choose which SMIs to work with based on their promotional campaign objectives.
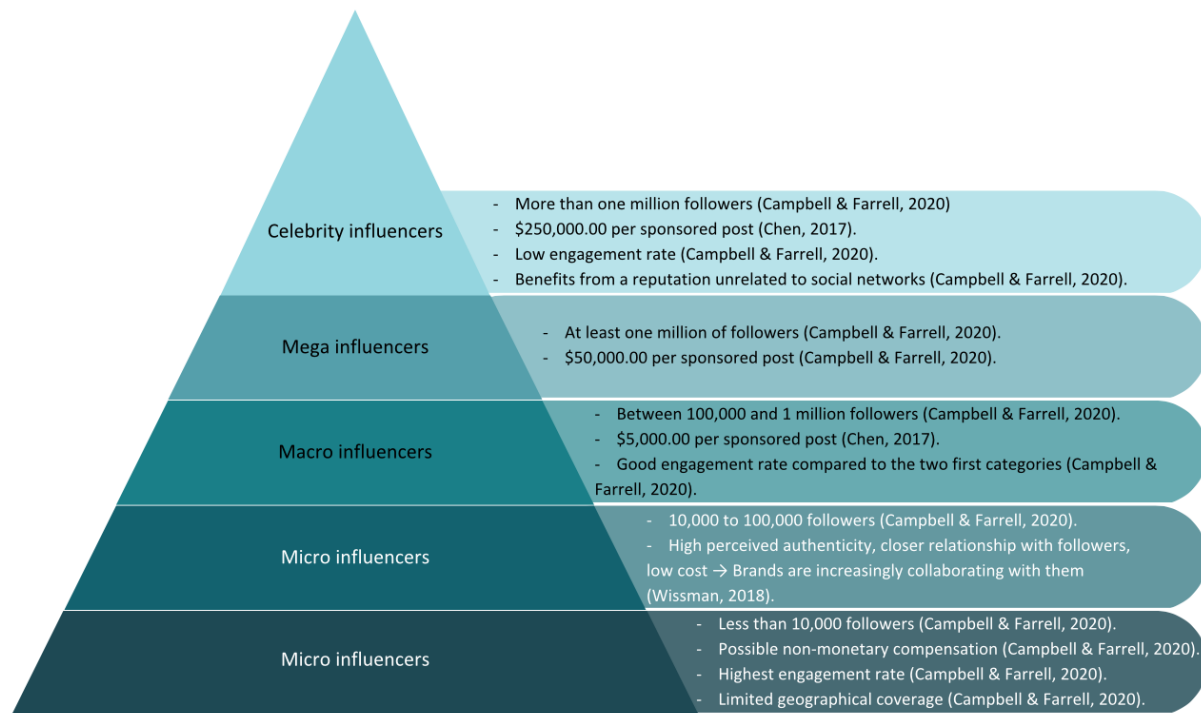
Figure 1. The different type of social media influencers (own figure)

2.2.2.2   The characteristics of a social media influencer

a.   Trust

Consumer scepticism towards traditional advertising methods due to a lack of trust in these tactics has enabled the success of influencer marketing, which is now an integral part of many brands' strategies (Gerdeman, 2019; Leung et al., 2022). SMIs appear to bring more authenticity, defined as behaving in accordance with your true nature (Moulard et al., 2016), because the latter communicate in a natural way, compared to celebrity endorsement where individuals read a well-defined script (Gerdeman, 2019). Moreover, the fact that these SMIs use their own words to address their followers makes them think that the latter enjoy the communication process they are immersed in (Jun & Yi, 2020).

Two principles tend to explain the trust that a SMIs' followers place in him or her. Firstly, the principle of homophily (McPherson et al., 2001), which explains that people with similar interests, experiences and preferences tend to like the same products and content (Liu-Thompkins, 2012), justifies the fact that a SMI's community is composed of similar people. As a result, social medias users will follow SMIs with whom they identify. Secondly, the social cognitive theory explains that individuals will be more easily influenced by people with whom they share similarities (Bandura, 1994). Through their study, Lou and Yuan (2018) observed a positive relationship between the follower's perceived similarities with the SMI and the trust that the latter places in his or her sponsored posts. In other words, if the follower identifies with the SMI, he or she will not doubt its sincerity when the latter is praising a product or service. Moreover, they also found a positive relationship between the trustworthiness of the SMI and brand awareness (Lou & Yuan, 2018).

SMIs post content on social medias quite frequently, sharing moments of their private lives, giving their opinions and interacting with their community. This behaviour makes followers think that they know the SMI intimately, which fosters a relationship of trust (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). This is a phenomenon that consumers cannot maintain with a brand. However, by using influencer marketing, brands are likely to transfer this sense of trust, which improves the effectiveness of the promotional campaign (Leung et al., 2022).

b. Attractiveness

With regard to influencer marketing, one of the advantages for brands to collaborate with SMIs who are known to be attractive is that they have the ability, through their physical and social characteristics, to captivate and direct the attention of their community to the promoted brand. As a result, followers will retain and recognize the brand more (Lou & Yuan, 2018), which will increase brand awareness. Furthermore, several studies have shown that the attractiveness of a source positively impacts consumers' attitude towards a brand, product or service which in turn encourages their purchase intentions (Petty et al., 1983; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Erdogan, 1999; Bardia et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2019). However, this last element is not endorsed by all researchers, given that a study conducted by Lim et al. (2019) with 200 respondents show that the attractiveness of SMIs did influence consumers' positive attitudes but not their purchase intentions. Consequently, the influence of the attractiveness of a SMI on consumer purchase intentions is a point of debate in the scientific literature. Finally, the attractiveness of a SMI has been shown to have a direct influence on the effectiveness of an advertisement (McGuire, 1985).

c. Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree of trust and reliability returned by a source (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970) and consequently to the perceived quality of its discourse by its auditors (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Researchers have identified many attributes inherent in a person's credibility, namely, expertise, knowledge, experience, trust, goodwill, attractiveness and likability (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953; McGuire, 1985; McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Munnukka et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2017). Some of these attributes are worth exploring further. An individual's expertise reflects his or her legitimacy to discuss certain topics in which he or she has knowledge, abilities and skills. Trustworthiness can be defined as the auditor's perception of the speaker's honesty and sincerity (Giffin, 1967). Finally, an individual's goodwill refers to the attention he or she gives to his or her audience (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Several of these attributes have been studied in order to define their impacts on brands and consumers. When selecting SMIs to collaborate with, it is important for brands to take into account their level of credibility. In the case of influencer marketing, the number of followers, specifically on Twitter and Instagram, can be an indicator of the credibility of the account holder (Jin & Phua, 2014; De Veirman et al., 2017). The credibility of a SMI is therefore an element to consider when choosing them for various reasons.

First of all, it has been shown that the credibility of a source can potentially influence consumer behaviour and perception towards the brand (Ohanian, 1990; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Wang et al. 2017). Furthermore, several researchers found a positive correlation between the SMI's credibility, the consumer's attitude and purchase intention (Chan et al. 2013; Lim et al., 2017). Indeed, if a consumer develops positive attitude towards the credibility of a SMI, there is higher chances that he or she will purchase the product or service promote by the latter (Lim et al., 2017).

Regarding purchase intentions, this demonstrates that by using influencer marketing, brands can potentially increase their sales, thanks to the SMI's credibility. Nevertheless, this positive relationship is not supported by Lou and Yuan (2018), who during their study found that none of the attributes that make up a SMI's credibility, positively affected consumer purchase intentions. A similar conclusion was reached by Lim et al. (2017) who found in their study no significant relationship between these two variables. The idea of a positive relationship between a SMI's credibility on consumers' purchase intentions is therefore not unanimously supported by researchers.

Secondly, Chakraborty and Bhat (2018) demonstrated that the credibility of a source was reinforced by the perception that consumers have of the quality and reliability of its opinion, which positively impacts the brand awareness, in the case of influencer marketing. A similar observation was made by Lou and Yuan (2018), who demonstrated that a SMI's expertise and attractiveness, both of which enhance the credibility of a source, contribute to improve brand awareness. As a result, SMIs' credibility represents an important point for brands to consider because the more credible the SMIs are, the more persuasive they will be in the message they wish to convey (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Moreover, it appears that advertising broadcast on social medias is more credible than that conveyed by traditional media (Shareef et al., 2019).

In addition to the credibility of SMIs, the one of social medias is also beneficial to brands, given that advertising on these platforms is more credible than that conveyed by traditional medias. Indeed, individuals prefer to gather, compare and evaluate the views of others in order to form an opinion about an offer, rather than simply listening to the recommendations of traditional advertising (Lu et al., 2005; Logan et al., 2012; Hayes & King, 2014; Aswani et al., 2018).

2.2.2   Definition of influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is defined as a marketing strategy that picks and incentivizes social media influencers in order to engage their followers and reach a target market, whether it is to improve brand awareness, endorse a message, reinforce followers' positive attitude and behaviour or increase sales (Lou & Yuan, 2018; Jarrar et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2022). The ultimate goal of this strategy is to enhance the company's performance (Leung et al., 2022).

Social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others are increasingly popular among users, making influencer marketing an essential tool for brands to engage their audience (Khamis et al., 2017). Collaborating with SMIs allows brands to reach a large number of people through their reputation. Specifically, Leung et al. (2022) identified three necessary key characteristics for developing an influencer marketing strategy. First, the company selects the SMIs they wish to work with and provides them with incentives. Second, the SMIs promote the brand to their community on social medias, generating eWOM. Third, the brand leverages the SMIs' resources, including their followers, positioning, content, and trust from their community, by providing offers to potential consumers (Leung et al., 2022).

Influencer marketing has proven its effectiveness over the last few years which can be explained using two theories: social learning theory and credibility theory. On the one hand, the social learning theory, developed by Bandura (1963), helps us understand how consumers can be influenced by the behaviour and actions of SMIs on social media platforms. According to this theory, people tend to imitate the behaviours of those they view as role models. These role models are individuals who have the ability to directly or indirectly influence the behaviour of others, thanks to their popularity, expertise, and credibility (Bandura, 1986; Al Kurdi et al., 2022). For influencer marketing, these role models are the social media influencers who can affect the behaviour and purchasing decisions of their

followers (Kim, 2021). On the other hand, the credibility theory states that consumers are more likely to believe a trustworthy person like a SMI, as opposed to an advertiser (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Freiden, 1984; Ohanian, 1991; Erdogan, 1999). Indeed, Lou and Yuan (2018) observed that a SMI is generally followed by people who identify with him or her, which positively influences the trust that these people have in the individual and, by extension, in his or her sponsored publications which affects positively the brand awareness and purchase intention. Moreover, Kelman (1958) identified three essential traits for the persuasiveness of a promotional messenger, namely: authority, credibility, and social attractiveness. In addition, expertise could also be added to these three traits, as demonstrated by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) who found that Instagram users' trust in SMIs' sponsored posts was governed by their perception of the SMI as an expert in their field. However, not all researchers obtained the same results on this last point, given that Lou and Yuan (2018) found that a SMI's expertise had no impact on trust in sponsored content. This last element is therefore the subject of some debate and disagreement in the scientific literature. In the end, influencer marketing is effective thanks to the bonds of identification between the SMI and its followers, the trust they inspire, but also because of their persuasiveness and, potentially, their expertise.

To illustrate the effectiveness of influencer marketing, some SMIs have such a large audience that they can reach the same audience as some TV channels (Marwick, 2015). This is not surprising given that the average internet user spends 2.45 hours per day, or 147 minutes, on social medias (Satista, 2023). Influencer marketing is said to be the relevant step in digital marketing, taking into account the rise of the Internet, social medias and the ever-increasing number of users. Additionally, 93% of marketers have reported that influencer marketing helps increase brand awareness, leading to the acquisition of new customers (Santora, 2017). Moreover, the effectiveness of influencer marketing has been demonstrated by TechJournal South, which found that Facebook ads involving SMIs are 50% more effective than those without their endorsements (TechJournal South, 2011 in Lueck 2015). As a result, marketers have recognized the growing importance of influencer marketing, with spending in this type of promotion estimated to reach 29.94 billion euros by 2023 (Statista, 2023).

2.2.3   The benefits of influencer marketing

The benefits of influencer marketing are well-known and highly discussed in academic publications, both from a general perspective and within specific industries. Therefore, the benefits of influencer marketing will be discussed, but not developed in detail. The table below gives an overview of the different benefits of an influencer marketing campaign.

The benefits of influencer marketing	Explanations
Segmentation and target	Market segmentation allows brands to divide their consumers into smaller homogenous groups which will enable them to provide specific marketing efforts according to the target group and gain a competitive advantage within this segment (Goyat, 2011). As previously stated, the homophily principle explains that social media users will follow SMIs with whom they identify (McPherson et al., 2001; Liu-Thompkins, 2012). As a result, the use of influencer marketing opens up a new way for firms looking to reach homogeneous segments of consumers and allow them to accomplish two goals, namely, segmenting and targeting potential buyers (Leung et al., 2022).

Brand awareness	Several researchers have shown that influencer marketing helps to improve brand awareness, particularly through SMIs' authenticity, attractiveness and credibility (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Jarrar et al., 2020). Keller defines brand awareness as the *"customers' ability to recall and recognize a brand"* (2001, p. 8). This implies that consumers should not only know the name of the brand, but also all that surrounds it, such as the logo or symbols associated with it and the categories of products or services it offers. The higher the brand awareness, the more people will think about the brand when making purchasing decisions and potentially become consumers (Witrie Nuringtyas Gita A, 2020; Ferina et al., 2021). To illustrate this, Černikovaitė (2019) showed in a study that 92% of marketers believed that influencer marketing helped increase brand awareness.
Distinctiveness	The distinctiveness of a SMI here consists of the positioning or attributes associated with them. For example, a SMI may be known for their ability to effectively demonstrate the features of a product, have an audience essentially made up of decoration fans, be innovation-oriented, etc (Leung et al., 2022). Therefore, the distinctiveness of some SMIs is beneficial to brands for several reasons. The first is that consumers like to watch original and surprising content (Moldovan et al., 2011). Secondly, it appears that SMIs offering distinctive content would be considered more credible and informed (Ki & Kim, 2019). Finally, originality goes hand in hand with authenticity (Nunes et al., 2021), which characterizes successful SMIs (Casaló et al., 2020). Therefore, by choosing a SMI that differentiates itself in the market, the brand can benefit from this unique and distinctive aspect in order to transfer it to the brand's attributes, thus distinguishing it from its competitors (Leung et al., 2022). However, marketers must be careful not to stray from the product's own characteristics when selecting a SMI. Indeed, the match between the SMI and the product, called *match-up* (Kamins, 1990), is a necessary condition for a successful marketing campaign (Lim et al., 2017), especially since it positively influences consumers' purchase intentions (Shimp, 2000; Pradhan et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2017) and consumers' attitudes towards advertising (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Lim et al., 2017).
Parasocial interaction theory	Parasocial interaction (PSI) theory refers to the psychological relationship that individuals can develop with media figures or celebrities, based on one-sided interactions such as watching their TV shows, reading their books, or following them on social media. It describes the way in which people form a sense of connection and intimacy with media personalities, despite the absence of any real-life contact or interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Aw & Labrecque, 2020). The parasocial relationship develops overtime between the SMI and his or her audience, which is nurtured by frequent interactions between the two parties (Lou, 2021), and create a sense of closeness and even a sense of identification for the SMI (Shan et al., 2020; Balaban et al., 2022; Hudders & De Jans, 2022). Moreover, by using SMIs as intermediaries, brands can really create a proximity relationship with their target audience. The PSI has significant impacts on influencer marketing in that it enhances the credibility and reliability of SMIs, leading to positive effects on the promoted brand and consumers' purchase intentions (Kim & Song, 2016; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Ong et al., 2022). Overall, strong parasocial interaction makes sponsored posts by SMIs more effective (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015; Munnukka et al., 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017; Balaban & Mustă̧țea, 2019).

2.2.4   The limitations of influencer marketing

Research into the harmful effects of influencer marketing, whether for brands, SMIs or consumers, is fairly limited (Taylor, 2020; Hudders & Lou, 2023). This section aims to explain and elaborate on the dangers of this type of marketing for brands, but also for consumers and SMIs. However, the focus will be on the risks of this type of marketing for brands, given the subject of this thesis.

2.2.4.1   Credibility and authenticity issues

Several researchers have shown that consumers are sceptical about the reliability and veracity of sponsored publications (Bang & Lee, 2016; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2017). Indeed, consumers can potentially be suspicious of such publications not knowing the motivations of SMIs (Lou & Yuan, 2018). When SMIs praise certain products or services, they may share their personal and objective opinions. However, it is also possible that they have not tested the promoted product or service, or do not like it, but still recommend it to their community, probably for financial reasons. Consumers will therefore question the authenticity and honesty of a SMI who is selling a product or service in a very complimentary way (McQuarrie et al., 2013) as they will consider the content to be manipulative. As a result, it has the effect of reducing the value of advertising (Ducoffe, 1996) as well as decreasing consumers' sense of responsiveness (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). Therefore, consumer attitudes, purchase intention and brand image may be impacted by consumer scepticism towards sponsored publications.

The credibility and authenticity issues faced by SMIs can be detrimental to brands, but also to them. Although this is a legal requirement, which will be discussed later in this work, SMIs do not always disclose the sponsored nature of content because, as explained above, this can lead to reluctance and scepticism on the part of consumers. As a result, this impacts not only the effectiveness of the promotion (Ducoffe, 1996; Karagür et al., 2022) but also the credibility of the SMI in question (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020), which can potentially damage his or her reputation and lead to a loss of subscribers.

A brand's credibility could also be damaged if the chosen SMI does not fit with the brand or the offer it is promoting. As explained earlier, it is important for a successful campaign that marketers collaborate with SMIs who fit the brand, its image and its values (Kamins, 1990; Lim et al., 2017). But what if the brand selects a SMI who does not fit the profile to represent the brand? They are mostly active in niches. Some are specialized in the field of beauty, fashion, sport, ... As a result, their community is almost essentially composed of people sharing the same interests, as explained by the principle of homophily. Let's imagine a fitness SMI who does not have any pets promoting a pet food brand. Apart from the fact that the target will probably not be reached, it also risks damaging the credibility of the brand, as well as the one of the SMI towards the followers. Therefore, it is essential for these two actors to make partnerships that correspond to them, in line with their area of expertise and values, in order to remain consistent with their audience.

2.2.4.2 Misleading practices

A deceptive practice carried out by SMIs is the purchase of followers or likes. This kind of practice can be justified by the agency theory which explains that in a contract between two parties, namely the agent (i.e., the SMI) and the principal (i.e., the brand), an asymmetry of information can occur because the interests of the two parties are not aligned. As a result, the agent will withhold useful information from the principal or communicate inaccurate ones to the principal, which the latter cannot verify (Mishra et al., 1998; Gu et al., 2010). In our case, a SMI will describe himself or herself as influential to brands, thanks to his or her high number of followers and likes, and will ask for a consequential payment. In addition to the financial loss, the repercussion for the brand will be that it will not distinguish a significant improvement in brand awareness (Ferina et al., 2019). For this reason, marketers should always check beforehand that a SMI is not engaged in such questionable practices (Anand et al., 2019).

2.2.4.3 Changes in social media algorithms

The emergence of new social medias impacts the algorithm of existing ones. For example, in response to the emergence of TikTok, Instagram changed its algorithm to keep its users active on the platform, in particular with the development of Reels[3], publication suggestions that allow users to discover new accounts (Pellerin, s.d.). As a result, the engagement generated by SMIs decreased considerably, which impacted the reach and effectiveness of their partnerships with brands (Ferina et al., 2021). Marketers should therefore be cautious, as the success of their marketing campaign depends partly on the algorithm of the social medias on which the product or service is promoted, which is out of their control.

2.2.4.4 Lack of control over content

Unlike traditional marketing or celebrity endorsement, where brands decide and control the promotional messages, content and environment in which products or services will be promoted (Van der Lans et al., 2010; Hinz et al., 2011), influencer marketing implies that marketers will have to relinquish some of their control as SMIs are independent content creators (Leung et al., 2022). Generally, brands can opt for two different strategies. The first is that they provide social media influencers with the objectives of the campaign, the message to be conveyed and the expected results. The second involves brands giving the SMI a free hand to create content that is specific to their image (Leung et al., 2022). However, it can happen that the content published by the latter is not in line with the brand's identity and the message it wishes to convey. As a result, SMIs will therefore create confusion among consumers, which will alter the latter's brand recall (Chang, 2018). This may also result in the credibility of the SMI being questioned as well as the accuracy of this recommendation (Berthon et al., 2008). Overall, the effectiveness of the marketing campaign will be affected by the incongruence between the brand and the social media influencer's discourse (Leung et al., 2022).

---

[3] Content format in the form of short videos.

2.2.4.5 Brand image

The aim of influencer marketing is to associate a brand's image with a public figure. However, in today's world, bad buzz on the Internet is very common and the information flows very quickly. A brand is never safe from having its SMI involved in a scandal, which will immediately impact the brand's image (Leung et al., 2022). This is one of the reasons why brands use virtual SMIs[4], in order to keep control over the latter, avoiding the inconvenience that could be caused by a partnership with a human influencer (Bram, 2019).

In 2020, the ready-to-wear brand Lacoste ended its collaboration with two of its ambassadors, Romeo Elvis and Moha La Squale, accused of sexual assault on social medias. Lacoste said that the behaviour of one of these two singers was not in line with the values of the brand. In addition, following this controversy, a spokesperson of the French brand had to issue a statement which said: *"Our brand and our teams are strongly committed to the values of respect and tolerance transmitted by our founder and we absolutely condemn any form of violence, harassment and aggression"* (BFM Business, 2020). This is a good example showing that a SMI at the heart of a bad buzz can have a reputational cost for the brand. Additionally, financial and organizational costs can also occur if a project has to be stopped in an unexpectedly way.

2.2.4.6 Brand loyalty and customer retention

Social media influencers have a relationship of trust with their community. When they recommend certain products or services, this trust tends to be transferred to brands as well. The interesting thing for marketers is to maintain this trust and turn it into loyalty. Unfortunately, to achieve this result, a single influencer marketing campaign will not be sufficient (Leung et al., 2022). Furthermore, it appears that influencer marketing is useful for attracting new consumers, but not for retaining existing ones (Leung et al., 2022). Consequently, marketers need to pay particular attention to this limited performance of influencer marketing, if their strategy is focused on building brand loyalty and retaining consumers.

2.2.4.7 Short-term effect and brands overlap

Due to the growing success of influencer marketing, more and more brands are using it. As a result, sponsored posts are multiplying on social medias and sometimes overlapping. It is not surprising that a SMI publishes several sponsored contents in one day. As a result, marketing campaigns can potentially be drowned out by others, especially since stories generally last only 24 hours, and publications quickly find themselves buried on users' news feeds by hundreds of others, resulting in only short-term and sometimes insignificant improvement (Ferina et al., 2021).

---

[4] A virtual influencer is *"an entity humanlike or not that is autonomously controlled by artificial intelligence and visually presented as an interactive, real-time rendered being in a digital environment"* (Sands et al., 2022, p. 777).

2.2.4.8 Limitations of influencer marketing for social media influencers and consumers

Influencer marketing is not just dangerous for brands, but also for SMIs. Firstly, influencer marketing is a very competitive business. Indeed, there are already a lot of SMIs and an increasing number of individuals trying to make their way and climb the ladder in this profession. As a result, SMIs need to stand out from the crowd in order to remain attractive to brands. This attractiveness is measured in terms of likes, engagement rates and other measures that gauge the influence of a SMI on its community. As a result, SMIs can feel constant pressure to maintain their reputation, comparing themselves to others, which can potentially impact their mental health. In addition to this war for likes and followers, SMIs must constantly try to satisfy the demands of brands and their followers (Hudders & Lou, 2023). Secondly, in order to maintain their connection with their community and thus their success, SMIs need to regularly post content, engage with their followers and share moments from their lives. Consequently, some may find it difficult to maintain their privacy, which is exposed to the public in order to optimize this relationship of trust and proximity with their subscribers (Hudders & Lou, 2023). Another disadvantage of being known on social medias is that SMIs are constantly being judged on their actions, decisions, words or anything else that the public can evaluate. On these platforms, it is very easy to express oneself, by leaving a comment under a publication, by sending a private message, … Therefore, SMIs are very often confronted with criticisms and sometimes even hate messages, which can strongly affect them. For example, Richard, a French SMI, told France Inter[5] about the cyber harassment he has suffered: *"We evolve with hate. I get insulted on the networks every minute of my life. But it's not a total reflection of society either, it's an extract from society. I have the impression that there are fewer filters on TikTok. The hardest thing is the death threats. You never know whether it's true or not. People have already found my address and come down to my house to insult me"* (France Inter, 2022).

With regards to consumers, the latter should remain cautious regarding this type of promotion. A common criticism of influencer marketing is the indirect or direct manipulation created by this type of advertising. It is likely that users, while surfing on social medias, do not notice that a publication is actually sponsored and that the author of this content is being paid in some way. Legally, when a publication on social medias is the object of a partnership between the SMI and a brand, it must contain a warning that it is sponsored content. Indeed, if Internet users are not warned of the sponsored side of a publication, they cannot protect themselves against being influenced by a promotional message (Boerman et al., 2017). As a result, the advertising becomes unfair. The risk of manipulation has therefore been reduced thanks to the law, but still exists when the law is not respected.

---

[5] French radio station.

2.2.5 Legal aspects

This section examines and develops the legal aspects of influencer marketing in Europe and the United States. The choice of these two continents is based on statistics indicating a significantly higher number of companies offering influencer marketing services in these regions in 2021 (Statista, 2023). Due to recent legal changes, the case of France will also be discussed.

2.2.5.1 Europe

In Europe, influencer marketing is regulated by the laws and regulations of each EU member country. However, there are rules and guidelines at EU level that apply to all member countries, including Belgium.

The regulation of influencer marketing falls under the advertising provisions of the Code of Economic Law, and specifically, point 4.2.6. of Directive 2005/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. This directive regulates commercial practices that are considered unfair to consumers (Union européenne, 2021). Unfair commercial practices are prohibited by the Code of Economic Law, which distinguishes between misleading actions, omissions and aggressive practices (SPF Economie, 2023).

The law considers an individual to be advertising when he or she promotes a product, service, brand or other in any way, in return for a monetary or non-monetary benefit. The basic rule indicated by the law is that *"advertising must always be recognizable as such and that it must be made clear to the consumer that it is a commercial message"* (SPF Economie, 2023). Furthermore, this directive states that SMIs have a duty to communicate the partnership clearly and legibly, so that the consumer quickly understands that it is an advertisement (Union européenne, 2021). This rule, if not respected, can be costly for the SMI who committed the fault. As an example, in 2021, Nabilla Benattia-Vergara, a French SMI, was forced to pay a fine of 20,000 euros for omitting to indicate the commercial nature when promoting a trading training site (Ministère de l'économie des finances et de la relance, 2021). In practice, many SMIs fail to indicate the commercial nature of their publication, or make it difficult to read and detect[6]. However, ARPP[7] has observed an improvement in transparency among SMIs in France. Indeed, in 2022, 83% of commercial collaborations published by SMIs contained a beginning of identification, which translates into a 10% increase on the previous year (ARPP, 2022). We can only hope that this trend will continue to grow, and will also apply to other countries.

Influencer marketing is therefore a fairly complicated area to regulate considering the constant evolution of social medias, where new platforms frequently appear, providing new functionalities (Carpenter & Bonin, 2021). Carpenter and Bonin (2021) stress the importance of maintaining a flexible regulatory framework for influencer marketing, considering its unpredictable future.

---

[6] See examples of sponsored stories that do not comply with the law in Appendix I.
[7] Autorité de Régulation Professionnelle de la Publicité

2.2.5.2 France

Although regulations in other countries will not be discussed in this research paper, it is essential to look at recent regulations in force in France, which was the first European country to adopt a legal framework devoted exclusively to influencer marketing. Indeed, in June 2023, the French Parliament unanimously adopted the proposed law by Arthur Delaporte and Stéphane Vojetta, French MPs, aimed at regulating influencer marketing and protecting consumers against its scams and abuses. Certain elements of this law deserve further examination. The Law of 9 June 2023:

(1) prohibits the promotion of aesthetic, surgical, therapeutic and reconstruction procedures reserved for health professionals;

(2) prohibits the promotion of certain financial products or services, games of chance or gambling, illicit and counterfeit products;

(3) introduces protection for consumers with regard to drop shipping practices, as it obliges SMIs to inform consumers of the identity of the supplier, and to take responsibility for the availability, authenticity and conformity of products;

(4) requires SMIs to indicate the following message on all retouched photos or videos: "Retouched images".

(5) also applies to SMIs domiciled in another country, if they share an advertising message aimed at the French population.

France has therefore decided to move up a gear by introducing a legal framework regulating the use of influencer marketing in a comprehensive way. Will other countries in the European Union do the same?

2.2.5.3 United States

As the primary regulator of advertising practices in the United States, the Federal Trade Commission is the agency responsible for regulating influencer marketing (Carpenter & Bonin, 2021). The mission of the more than 100-year-old commission is *"to protect the public from deceptive or unfair business practices and from unfair methods of competition through law enforcement, advocacy, research, and education"* (Federal Trade Commission, 2019). The FTC has set up endorsement guides, the purpose of which is to guide and assist professionals in complying with the rules on deceptive practices contained in Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act. The particularity of these regulations is that they are not binding law (Carpenter & Bonin, 2021).

Section 5 of the FTC Act prohibits *"unfair methods of competition in or affecting commerce"* (Federal Trade Commission, 2022). The FTC considers a method unfair when it:

(1) *"Causes or is likely to cause substantial injury to consumers"* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).
(2) *"Cannot be reasonably avoided by consumers"* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).
(3) *"Is not outweighed by countervailing benefits to consumers or to competition"* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

Certain elements must be proven in order to determine whether or not Section 5 of the FTC Act has been violated, namely:

(1) *"There must be a representation, omission or practice that is likely to mislead the consumer."* (Federal Trade Commission, 1983, p. 1).

(2) The FTC *"examine the practice from the perspective of a consumer acting reasonably in the circumstances."* (Federal Trade Commission, 1983, p. 1).

(3) *"The representation, omission, or practice must be a "material" one."* (Federal Trade Commission, 1983, p. 1).

In other words, the Commission considers that Section 5 of the FTC Act has been violated *"if there is a representation, omission or practice that is likely to mislead the consumer acting reasonably in the circumstances, to the consumer's detriment."* (Federal Trade Commission, 1983, p. 2). If necessary, the FTC investigates the violation. If the violation is confirmed, the case will be resolved either by settlement of the complaint through a consent order by the defendant, which may be a brand, an agency or a SMI, or, if the defendant does not cooperate, injunctions, civil penalties or damages may be imposed (Carpenter & Bonin, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, the Endorsement Guides provided by the FTC provide guidance to individuals involved in influencer marketing to avoid violations of Section 5 of the FTC Act (Carpenter & Bonin, 2021). Not all of the guidance provided in this guide will be discussed in this work, but the most interesting ones for the purposes of this thesis are those mentioned below:

(6) *"Endorsements must reflect the honest opinions, findings, beliefs, or experience of the endorser. Furthermore, an endorsement may not convey any express or implied representation that would be deceptive if made directly by the advertiser."* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

(7) *"When the advertisement represents that the endorser uses the endorsed product, the endorser must have been a bona fide user of it at the time the endorsement was given. Additionally, the advertiser may continue to run the advertisement only so long as it has good reason to believe that the endorser remains a bona fide user of the product."* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

(8) *"Advertisers are subject to liability for false or unsubstantiated statements made through endorsements, or for failing to disclose material connections between themselves and their endorsers."* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

(9) *"An advertisement containing an endorsement relating the experience of one or more consumers on a central or key attribute of the product or service also will likely be interpreted as representing that the endorser's experience is representative of what consumers will generally achieve with the advertised product or service in actual, albeit variable, conditions of use. […]."* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

(10) *"When there exists a connection between the endorser and the seller of the advertised product that might materially affect the weight or credibility of the endorsement (i.e., the connection is not reasonably expected by the audience), such connection must be fully disclosed."* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

This fifth guidance is particularly important and is subject to various conditions. In fact, the FTC has drafted a document called "Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers" in which it details the various cases in which SMIs must indicate their material connection with the brand being promoted. A material connection is required when the SMI has *"a financial, employment, personal, or family relationship with a brand"* (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.). In order to properly indicate the partnership, SMIs have a duty to communicate it clearly using plain language, so that it is difficult for the consumer to miss the disclosure (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.). It should be noted that this practice will depend on the platform used for the partnership, as the functionality varies greatly from one social media to another. Typically, the disclosure will take the form of a hashtag indicating the advertisement such as "#Ad", "#Sponsored", ... (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

3 CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

In the previous chapter, the theoretical elements applicable to the research question were explored. This chapter presents the methodology followed in this research, as well as the design and execution of the study.

Nowadays, the dangers imposed by influencer marketing is a subject that receives very little attention in the scientific literature. The aim of this study was therefore to better understand and deepen knowledge of this subject, which makes the exploratory approach the most appropriate in this case. Furthermore, this study uses an inductive approach, as the theoretical framework is restricted to existing scientific literature dealing with influencer marketing, its benefits and limitations. Consequently, the research question will be addressed by a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with different target groups, supported by previously conducted scientific research (Malhotra et al., 2017).

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research design

A qualitative study is by definition *"an unstructured, primarily exploratory design based on small samples, intended to provide depth, insight and understanding"* (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 150). In order to gain more information and understanding about the dangers of influencer marketing for brands, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with three groups of stakeholders. The first group was made up of 10 consumers, i.e., individuals who had already engaged[8] with SMIs on social medias. The second group comprises 5 marketing experts who may or may not have used the services of SMIs. Finally, the third group represents 5 SMIs who have already collaborated with brands. As an in-depth interview is defined by Malhotra et al. as *"an unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single participant is probed by an experienced interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic"* (2017, p. 209), this was the best way to obtain a better understanding of the subject. In addition, interviewing all the individuals affected by influencer marketing, namely consumers, marketing experts and SMIs, made it possible to observe and compare the opinions of these different stakeholders in order to consider the subject as a whole. This qualitative research tool was therefore the best way to obtain detailed information on the subject at hand, especially as some of the questions asked were quite personal, allowing participants to give their opinions in complete transparency and honesty (Malhotra et al., 2017).

---

[8] Possible interactions between a consumer and a SMI can be likes, comments, views, subscriptions, etc.

3.1.2 Samples

As explained above, three groups were studied. The table below shows the profiles of the various participants interviewed.

		Gender	Age	Profession
Consumers	1	Female	24	Marketing Officer
	2	Female	22	Student
	3	Female	25	Student
	4	Female	23	Student
	5	Female	30	Unemployed
	6	Female	23	Student
	7	Female	23	Student
	8	Male	25	Student
	9	Male	26	Student
	10	Male	22	Student

		Gender	Profession
Marketing experts	1	Female	CEO of a cosmetic brand
	2	Female	Communication manager
	3	Female	Business Manager
	4	Male	− Trainer and consultant in social medias and content marketing − Lecturer − Digital Project Manager
	5	Male	Brand Director of a luxury watch brand

		Gender	Number of followers[9]	Social media influencer's type[10]
SMIs	1	Female	77,400	Micro influencer
	2	Female	57,400	Micro influencer
	3	Female	16,400	Micro influencer
	4	Female	12,400	Micro influencer
	5	Female	11,000	Micro influencer

As far as consumers were concerned, the only criterion for interviewing them was that they should follow or have followed one or more SMIs on a social media. The consumer sample is quite homogeneous as 7 of the 10 consumers surveyed were women, many of them students in their twenties.

As for the marketing experts, the condition for being interviewed was to be in a marketing-related profession. These 5 professionals have quite varied profiles, and have all used influencer marketing at least once in their careers.

Regarding social media influencers, there is a certain homogeneity in terms of gender and type of SMIs. In fact, all participants are female and classified as micro influencers. This homogeneity can be

---

[9] Figures taken from the SMIs' Instagram accounts on 7 August 2023.
[10] Based on their number of followers on Instagram.

explained by the fact that other types of SMIs are rather difficult to reach. Among the panel of SMIs contacted, very few responded to my request, given the number of messages or similar solicitation they receive every day and their sometimes very busy schedules. To illustrate this point, 67 SMIs were contacted and seven accepted the interview, including two who did not respond afterwards. However, the number of followers counted by the participants is quite varied, ranging from 11,000 to more than 77,400 subscribers.

The sampling technique was based on non-probability sampling, consisting of a convenience sample (Malhotra et al., 2017). Indeed, the consumers were found through my personal network, which explains the similarity in the profiles observed. As for the marketing experts, they were contacted via various means, either through word of mouth or Internet searches. Finally, SMIs were contacted personally via social medias or by e-mail.

The qualitative interviews were conducted by myself, mainly by videoconference, due to the ease of this method, but some were held face-to-face when this suited the participant better. Each interview was conducted in the participants' native language, French. The duration of these interviews varied from 20 minutes to 60 minutes, depending on the experience of the participants.

3.1.3 Interview guides

Given the various individual profiles studied, three semi-structured questionnaires were drawn up, consisting of structured open-ended questions, along with probing questions to explore the participant's opinion in greater detail (Malhotra et al., 2017). This type of questionnaire was the most suitable for this study, as it allows to ask very specific questions relevant to the research, but also to deviate to other topics. The questions varied according to the profile of the individual interviewed, although some of them remained identical. Furthermore, each questionnaire adopted a funnel approach, meaning that the order of questions went from the most general to the most specific ones, making it possible to condition and put the participant at ease, but also to avoid the creation of bias caused if the specific questions preceded the more general ones (Malhotra et al., 2017).

3.1.3.1 Consumers' interview guide

The consumers' interview guide[11] consisted of four sections. The first one contained a comprehension question to check that participants understood what influencer marketing was, before proceeding with the rest of the questionnaire. Then, the second part was dedicated to consumers' habits regarding SMIs, in order to understand their profile and make them feel at ease. This was followed by a section on their experiences with SMIs. The aim of this one was to ask consumers about their potential purchases made via a SMI. When applicable, their purchasing experience was probed. Finally, the fourth and last part of the questionnaire dealt with their opinion on influencer marketing, and more specifically on the potential negative impact this type of promotion can have on a brand's image, consumer behaviour, and the influence a sponsored post can have on the latter.

---

[11] See the consumers' interview guide in Appendix II.

3.1.3.2   Marketing experts' interview guide

The interview guide for the marketing experts[12] consisted of four sections. The first one included a filter question asking participants if they had ever used influencer marketing, before proceeding with the rest of the questionnaire. Then, the second section was dedicated to their experience with influencer marketing, in order to understand their use and how collaborations went. If they had never used it, they were asked to explain why. After that, the third section focused on their opinion of influencer marketing, and more specifically on the potential negative impacts this type of promotion can have on brand image and awareness, as well as on consumer behaviour. Finally, the fourth part of the questionnaire dealt with predictions about influencer marketing, and aimed to poll participants on how they thought influencer marketing would evolve in the future.

3.1.3.3   Social media influencers' interview guide

The SMIs' interview guide[13] also consisted of four sections. The first part focused on SMIs' personal views on influencer marketing, followed by a second one on their experience with brands, which was designed to ask participants about the way they work, and about collaborations that have sometimes gone wrong. The third section dealt with SMIs' experiences with their communities, followed by a final part on their personal experience of influencer marketing, and its impact on their well-being.

3.1.4   Observations

As a social media user who has been part of the community of SMIs for just under ten years, I feel that these individuals influence me enormously on a daily basis. Over the years, I have watched this profession evolve and grow at astonishing speed. However, I was also able to observe some changes in the way brands and SMIs collaborate, and I am of the opinion that this profession is experiencing a renewal. My Master's degree in International Strategic Marketing also gave me a different perspective on influencer marketing, and enabled me to analyse the strategies implemented by brands. As a result, my experience as a consumer of influencer marketing, my studies, the guidance of my thesis supervisor as well as my two years' work experience in a company specialising in market research supported me in writing these interview guides, and enabled me to address the relevant topics of this study. Thanks to the twenty interviews conducted with the three groups of participants, I was able to understand the perceptions of these different stakeholders and capture the situation in its entirety.

---

[12] See the marketing experts' interview guide in Appendix III.
[13] See the SMIs' interview guide in Appendix IV.

3.1.5 Analysis and interpretation

To enable data analysis, each interview was recorded and transcribed using the verbatim principle, resulting in 50 pages of transcripts for consumers, 42 pages for marketing experts and 32 pages for SMIs, giving a total of 124 pages of transcripts[14]. The data was then coded and analysed using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. An iterative approach was used. Parent and child themes[15] were created on the basis of the literature review, supported by additional themes derived from the qualitative interviews. The data was then coded using these different themes.

Furthermore, two analyses were carried out: by participant group (i.e., consumers, marketing experts and social media influencers) and overall, i.e., all participants interviewed, regardless of the group to which they belonged. The aim of this second analysis is to compare the opinions on the dangers of influencer marketing of each of the three types of respondent, making it possible to address the research question as a whole, considering the opinions of each stakeholder.

---

[14] See one interview transcript in Appendix V.
[15] See coding tree in Appendix VI.

4 CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

4.1 Analysis of consumers: Attitudes and reactions to influencer marketing

4.1.1 Consumer perception and habits regarding influencer marketing

To assess consumers' understanding of influencer marketing, they were asked to define it in their own words. The results show that every respondent has a very precise and accurate definition of what influencer marketing is. Each of them describes it as a promotional strategy involving the endorsement of products or services by individuals who possess influence, with one respondent even referring to SMIs as "walking billboards". Five respondents mention the fact that this promotion takes place on social medias, and three indicate that SMIs are individuals with a large community on these various platforms. Finally, two respondents indicate that SMIs reach a target audience.

Subsequently, consumers' influencer marketing habits has been examined. They were asked about the type of SMIs they follow on social medias, and their motivations behind their choices. Responses regarding the types of SMIs followed and their respective fields of expertise exhibited considerable diversity. The most frequently mentioned areas of interest included food, sport, fashion, lifestyle and books. However, we also find SMIs who are humourists, YouTubers, automotive, watches or oenology specialists and many others. When it comes to what motivates respondents to follow these SMIs on social medias, the main reason cited by six of the ten respondents is that SMIs are a source of inspiration. Additionally, five cited the fact that it is a sort of entertainment. Other motivations were also cited by respondents, such as to make themselves dream, to discover new things, to follow people for whom they feel sympathy, to keep up to date with their content or to inform themselves.

After surveying respondents about their knowledge and experience of influencer marketing, they were questioned about their awareness and encounters with sponsored posts by SMIs, particularly focusing on instances that may have elicited negative emotions. Out of the ten people questioned, nine were able to provide an answer. The identified publications that had shocked respondents can be grouped into various categories. The first category concerns the promotion of drugs, financial products, diets or surgical procedures[16]. While commercial nature of the content remains uncertain, a story published by SMI Maeva Ghennam, a famous French reality TV contestant with over 3 million subscribers, was cited by four respondents. In this story, the French SMI talks about a surgery she underwent that enabled her to rejuvenate her female genitalia. Three of the four respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with such actions coming from a public figure who possesses a certain degree of responsibility towards their audience, which may include millions of individuals, including teenagers. One of the respondents additionally commented that it made this kind of practice far too accessible to anyone, and another supported a lack of ethics. In addition to this very specific example, some respondents suggested controlling or even banning the promotion of this type of product or service, which one of them justified by the fact that these SMIs are not experts in these fields and that this could lead to their trivialization.

"It's purely commercial. It's really about making money." - Respondent 9

A second category of responses pertains the lack of transparency highlighted by several respondents. Five respondents mentioned the promotion of low-quality products, scams, counterfeits and drop shipping. One respondent emphasized the lack of honesty and spoke of misleading advertising, while another said that SMIs promoting this type of product lose credibility. The third category revolves around a lack of consistency, as noted by one respondent who expressed surprise

---

[16] See examples of partnerships involving these controversial products or services in Appendix VII.

that a SMI was promoting a brand that directly competes with a product she had recently launched. In the same vein, one respondent drew attention to the lack of coherence in the actions of a SMI who promotes ethics but partners with the Shein company, a renowned Chinese fast-fashion brand known for its deplorable human and ecological conditions. Finally, the fourth category concerns a rather personal feeling expressed by one of the respondents, who explained that she didn't agree with a SMI's ideas, while another said she stopped following a SMI because of the number of partnerships she was making.

> *"Once again a collaboration, there's not really any real anymore."* - Respondent 4

Based on these results, we can conclude that influencer marketing is a fairly well-known technique among consumers, who follow SMIs mainly as a source of inspiration or entertainment. However, concerns arise regarding the lack of transparency, coherence, and consistency within SMIs' actions. Issues include the promotion of sensitive, low-quality, scams, counterfeits or drop shipping products, questionable partnerships, and endorsing competing brands. These findings emphasize the need for transparency, integrity, and ethical practices in influencer marketing to maintain credibility and trust.

However, a number of Belgian laws govern the promotion of sensitive products, such as medicines, surgery or financial investments. For example, for the promotion of medicines, the Law of March 25, 1964, on Medicines and the Royal Decree of April 7, 1995, Article 3, on Information and Advertising Concerning Medicines for Human Use, stipulate that the information disseminated must be accurate, up-to-date, and verifiable. In addition, SMIs are required to communicate only official information on the product's characteristics, and must not encourage improper or inappropriate use of the product. (APRIL 7, 1995. - Arrêté royal relatif à l'information et à la publicité concernant les médicaments à usage humain, 2021, art. 3, s.d.). With regard to financial investments, the FSMA[17] has proposed a regulation which was approved by Royal Decree on February 8, 2023 and came into force on May 17, 2023. These regulations aim to control the marketing of virtual currencies to the public, particularly by Belgian SMIs. Several obligations are imposed on the latter, particularly to protect consumers from the risks associated with financial investments (FSMA, 2023). In addition to advertising transparency rules, SMIs must now refrain from extolling the merits of these investments, promising future returns or using language deemed too technical (FSMA, 2023). In addition, SMIs will have to mention a warning about the risks associated with these practices, just as each advertisement will have to contain the following message: *"Virtual money, real risks. In crypto, only the risk is guaranteed"* (FSMA, 2023, p. 6).

Belgium is therefore adopting measures to regulate the promotion of sensitive products on social medias. However, it is necessary to ensure that each SMI complies with these rules, in order to resolve the doubts expressed by consumers.

---

[17] Financial Services and Markets Authority.

4.1.2 Buying experience driven by influencer marketing

After analysing the consumers' profiles, they were surveyed about their previous purchases made based on recommendations from SMIs. Then, the purchase experience was discussed, its positive and negative points, as well as its potential impact on the consumers' perception of the SMI.

Firstly, nine consumers who said they had already made a purchase following a recommendation from a SMI were asked about their motivations. The main motivation, cited by five respondents, was financial benefit. Indeed, SMIs often provide promotional codes for discounts on the endorsed products, which incentivized these consumers. Then, the second reason cited was the SMI's selling approach, such as appealing visuals and persuasive speeches. Appreciation of the product or the SMI, consumer curiosity and repeated exposure to the advertisement were also reasons that drove respondents to purchase. Of the ten people questioned, one said she had never given in to temptation. She explained that, with hindsight, she realized that she didn't really need the product, and that knowing that it was a sponsored publication didn't make her want to make a purchase, as she doesn't like being influenced and questions the reliability of the promoted products.

Respondents were then asked about the positive aspects of their shopping experience. The financial aspect, which was also the first motivation of the respondents, was the most frequently mentioned positive point. For the following aspects, two respondents each said they appreciated the SMI's transparency, the quality of the advertising, the opportunity to discover a new brand and product and finally, obtaining a product that met their expectations. Another respondent explained that she liked having the same product as a SMI she admired. On a slightly more sarcastic note, one respondent's only positive point from the buying experience was that it made him realize that this was the first and last time he'd buy this kind of product. This respondent had explained during the interview that this was a product that was very popular at that time and was being promoted by a huge number of SMIs from French reality TV.

After detailing the positive aspects of their purchasing experience, respondents were asked about the more negative ones. Only one of the nine respondents couldn't identify any negative points. The first negative aspect, cited by four respondents, was the delivery time, which turned out to be significantly longer than advertised. Next, three respondents complained about misleading advertising and drop-shipped products. Two were also disappointed by their purchase, which they found to be of poor quality. One respondent elaborated on their viewpoint, acknowledging that she knowingly purchased a low-quality drop-shipped product but regretted visiting the social media account of a French reality TV SMI to find a discount code for the desired product. She criticized this type of SMI for endorsing numerous low-end products. Additionally, two respondents said they had never received their purchase, while another pointed out that the products generally promoted were not very local. One respondent explains that she doesn't approve of the techniques some brands use, offering fake promotional codes. She said she had the impression that brands were inflating their prices, which turned out to be completely disproportionate. Finally, one respondent deplores the perverse side he associates with influencer marketing, which he believes leads to compulsive buying under the influence.

Following the study of consumers' purchasing experiences, they were asked whether the negative aspects of these had influenced their opinion of the SMI who had prompted them to make the purchase. Overall, we found that when the buying experience was positive, consumers' opinion of the SMI remained neutral or positive. However, when the experience is negative, consumers say they are disappointed, and sometimes even stop following the SMI in question. In addition, respondents were asked about the influence that paying a SMI as a result of a partnership could have on their confidence in the promoted product or service. It has been shown by several researchers (e.g., Bang

& Lee, 2016; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2017) that consumers tended to have doubts about the veracity of a SMI's recommendations, knowing that the latter was being paid to sell the brand (Lou & Yuan, 2018). Opinions differ somewhat on this question. It turns out that only two respondents indicated that this would have an influence, while seven specified that it depended on the SMI, the trust they placed in him or her and his or her transparency. Finally, only one respondent stated that the fact that a SMI was paid did not affect their trust in product placements.

> *"It depends on its transparency and the SMI. I think that if you want to sell something, you have to be convinced by the product. That's already the rule. After that, you have to realize that there's money at stake, and she has to make a living out of it. So, is it a lie? Not entirely. But do they bend the truth? That's for sure."* - Respondent 1
>
> *"Yes, I could totally avoid buying by saying to myself "this guy is paid for his partnership, so automatically his opinion is biased". He's selling something and at the same time, he has no choice but to sell it because he's being paid, so it's in his interest. I'm 100% of the opinion that it changes people's minds. I think we have to face facts. Money is a subject that changes some people's mentalities. So, for people for whom it's business, who earn their living from it, I think a lot of people are really prepared to say anything to make money."* - Respondent 8

Finally, consumers were asked about their future intentions to make further purchases based on SMIs' recommendations, despite any negative experiences they may have had. Of the nine people questioned, only one said they would no longer buy from SMIs, the main reason being that he was no longer on social medias and felt he no longer corresponded to the brands' target audience. For the remaining eight people, all indicated that they would repeat the experience. Some respondents explain this by the fact that influencer marketing allows them to discover new brands and products, while others say that as long as they trust the SMI, and consumer reviews of the product are positive, then they see no downside to going through SMIs again.

> *"In my opinion, it would be a bit of a shame to close the doors completely after a bad experience, because that would be like saying 'I am never going to a restaurant again because I didn't like one'. The offers are different both on the side of the companies selling the products, and on the side of the SMIs."* - Respondent 3

The results obtained enable us to address the first research question, "RQ1: What do consumers think of this type of marketing?" and suggest that influencer marketing is a convincing promotional technique. Indeed, almost all consumers have been influenced by SMIs at least once in their lives. The second research question, "RQ2: Do consumers already have a negative buying experience" can also be addressed. Although some negative aspects were mentioned by respondents, such as disappointing experiences or less convincing advertising, this will not prevent the vast majority of consumers from repeating the experience. However, it is in the interest of SMIs to promote quality brands and work on the quality of their partnerships, at the risk of disappointing their community and losing followers.

4.1.3 Consumers' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing for brands

As explained in the literature review, influencer marketing represents a number of dangers for brands, which it is important to take into account before entering into collaboration with social media influencers. In this section, consumers were asked about these dangers.

4.1.3.1 Consumers' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing for brand image

First, respondents were asked to think about certain aspects of influencer marketing that could damage a brand's image. Interestingly, all the consumers questioned indicated that a SMI's reputation, bad buzz or scandal could have a negative impact on a brand's image. However, six respondents indicated that the brand could not foresee a scandal occurring after a collaboration, but some specified that it was the company's responsibility to get informed about the SMI in question, in order to limit the risk of a bad buzz, in which the brand would become involved. In addition, one respondent was of the opinion that this kind of phenomenon only lasted in the short term, and that a brand can quickly shake off a scandal, as long as it defends itself effectively. Secondly, four respondents indicated that a brand making too many collaborations with SMIs risked compromising its image. The latter are suspicious of a brand that operates in this way, doubting the quality of the products it sells.

> *"For me, influencer marketing can have a negative impact on a brand's image from the moment when the objective no longer becomes to target a specific part of the population or a specific part of the customers, but becomes to really target everyone, to sell in bulk and to sell as much stock as possible by targeting as many people as possible. For me, this is where influencer marketing becomes a bit harmful. It can damage a brand's image to try to attack a clientele on all fronts, when they don't particularly want or need it. That's where I think it can break a brand, it's really when there's a desire to want to do too much or to want to sell too much or to want to reach too many people."* - Respondent 8

After that, four respondents stressed the importance of consistency between the brand and the chosen SMI. They explained that a brand should collaborate with people who embody its identity, image and values. In addition, one respondent specified the importance of a bond of trust between the brand and the SMI, and between the SMI and the targeted people. He explains that if a problem occurs, the brand's image will be negatively impacted.

> *"I think the SMI's personality could have a negative impact. You see, because there are people who are a bit stereotypical, people on reality TV who are a bit dumber, and so on. You might not have that vision in your company, that mentality and be a company that's a little bit higher, we'll say on an intellectual level, and entrusting ads to that kind of people who are listed and who are classified in another way, that could negatively impact the brand I think."* - Respondent 6

From these results, we can conclude that influencer marketing poses a number of dangers to a brand's image according to the consumers, which allows us to answer the third research question, entitled "RQ3: How influencer marketing affects brand image negatively?" from the consumer's point of view. The results indicate three important aspects. Firstly, among the risks identified for brand image, respondents highlighted the SMI's reputation. In the event of a scandal spreading widely on social media platforms, the brand's association with this SMI could be detrimental to its image. Secondly, excessive use of influencer marketing by a brand can raise doubts about its quality and reliability in the eyes of consumers, resulting in a negative influence on its image. Thirdly, it is

important to select a SMI who is consistent with the brand, and whom the brand trusts. As a result, marketers need to be careful in their campaign strategy and choice of SMIs, notably by researching them to assess reputational risks, but also to study their complementarity with the product or brand.

4.1.3.2 Consumers' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing concerning the lack of control over content

The brand's lack of control over the content published by a SMI has been identified as a danger to the brand. Indeed, some respondents explained that the quality of advertising will have an impact on the brand. If it is poorly executed, if the SMI does not effectively demonstrate the product or sends the wrong message to his or her community, the respondents believe that the brand is subject to image and reputation dangers.

> *"It is also how it's sold. So, you see, for example, reality TV people. Typically, if you're a brand and you trust someone from a reality TV, and you see that she reads a script and doesn't even use the product. To me, that discredits the social media influencer in particular but also the brand because you're thinking 'why is she selling you a product she's not even testing in front of you?'."* - Respondent 6

4.1.3.3 Consumers' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing for brand's credibility and authenticity

Regarding risks to brand credibility and authenticity, two respondents said they had doubts about a brand abusing influencer marketing. This danger was also cited as impacting on a brand's image. We can therefore conclude that the abusive use of SMIs can tarnish a brand's credibility with consumers.

4.1.3.4 Consumers' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing concerning brand overlaps

Among the ten consumers interviewed, two expressed concerns about the endorsement of multiple competing brands within a relatively short period of time. According to these respondents, this type of action could potentially negatively impact the brand being promoted, leading to a perceived lack of consistency on the part of consumers. As a result, they may be unable to differentiate and distinguish the brand from their competitors, which can undermine its distinctiveness. Furthermore, this inconsistency in brand promotion may also raise questions about the SMI's motivations and credibility. SMIs may appear to consumers to be pursuing financial gains or forming opportunistic partnerships rather than truly advocating for the brand's value proposition. Consequently, consumers' trust and loyalty to both SMIs and promoted brands can be undermined, leading to reduced engagement and conversion rates.

4.1.3.5 Consumers' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing on their behaviour

During the interviews, consumers were asked about the ways in which influencer marketing could negatively impact their purchasing behaviour. Firstly, half of the respondents explained that this type of marketing led to compulsive, unreflective purchases, to the detriment of consumers. Secondly, three mentioned the negative effects SMIs could have on the psychological health of subscribers, citing the sometimes seemingly perfect lives they lead, but which are merely an illusion, the filters used on certain pictures, or the beauty ideals conveyed by some of them. Respondents felt that this could be detrimental to some people, especially the younger ones, who are potentially more manipulable. Thirdly, three respondents explained that their intention to buy would be curbed if they saw a brand abusing influencer marketing. This observation echoes that made in sections 4.1.3.1 and 4.1.3.3. Consequently, we can conclude that abusive use of this type of promotion would be detrimental to the brand's image and credibility as well as to the behaviour of the potential buyers it wishes to reach.

Secondly, two respondents said they would not be inclined to buy a product promoted by a SMI, respectively, if they didn't like the individual in question or if the advertising was poorly executed. This also ties in with an observation made in section 4.1.3.1. As a result, it seems to be a danger affecting brand image and consumer behaviour.

Thirdly, one respondent said she was negatively influenced if the SMI's discourse was not in line with her actions. She gives the example of a SMI who advocates ethics and sustainability, but enters into partnerships with a brand in opposition to this vision. This observation supports the importance of consistency between the SMI's personality and the brand they promote. One respondent also explained that she was held back by the actions requested by SMIs, for example, to take part in a contest. Indeed, in such cases, it is generally required to subscribe to various other accounts, like the content, share it in a story and identify people, all with the aim of increasing the post's visibility. Finally, one respondent said that excessive promotions make her decide not to buy the promoted product, because she thinks it's not normal and must be a scam.

> *"There are lots of ways in which influencer marketing and SMIs in general can have a negative impact on people's daily lives, in relation to the fact that, firstly, social media influencers receive all these products. There's an impression of wealth towards all these SMIs, who don't really work, who are at home, who receive products for free and then simply advertise them. For me, this already conveys an initial negative image. As a potential consumer, it could influence my habits. It could influence me negatively by buying unnecessary things and making compulsive purchases. It could also have a negative influence on younger or more naive people who still have this reflex to do what everyone else is doing, to imitate trends."* - Respondent 6

These results provide answers to the fifth research question, entitled "RQ5: How influencer marketing affects consumer behaviour negatively?". It turns out that many practices can have a negative impact on consumers. In addition to leading to compulsive buying and potentially disastrous consequences for consumers' mental health, the misuse of influencer marketing can also dissuade some consumers from making a purchase. What's more, brands seem to have to take particular care when selecting SMIs, taking into account not only public appreciation, but also their professional qualities. Moreover, to remain credible in their eyes, they should avoid disproportionate discount offers or the imposition of overly strict participation conditions.

4.1.4   Social media influencers from French reality TV

One of the findings of the ten interviews concerned social media influencers from French reality TV. Indeed, this category of SMIs came up repeatedly in the consumers' discourse, and therefore deserved a special section. It seems that consumers have some misconceptions about reality TV SMIs. Indeed, the terms "drop shipping", "scam", "brand incredibility", "poor quality", "unreliable" have often been associated with this type of SMI by consumers. As a result, it's important for brands to be aware of the associations made by consumers with different types of SMI, before committing to a collaboration with them. Indeed, these terms risk being indirectly associated with the brand.

> *"For example, reality TV social media influencers, where you see, they give you promotions galore, doing five or six a day, and you can see that the promo codes are only for 50%, you see. In fact, that's the vice of money: the more money you have, the more you want. And I get the impression that social media influencers, even if their product is basically rubbish and lacking in quality, don't mind. As long as they can play on small buyers who don't really have a conscience and young buyers, they take advantage of it that it disgusts me a bit."* - Respondent 7

4.1.5   Consumers' perception of the evolution of influencer marketing

Some consumers have pointed out an evolution in influencer marketing practices. They spoke of stricter rules, a reduction in the number of product placements made by SMIs, and an increase in the quality of brands promoted. Two respondents explained that SMIs now have less room for error than before.

4.1.6 Summary of interviews: Consumer perceptions and experience of influencer marketing

A summary of the most important observations made during the qualitative interviews with consumers is given below:

Consumers' habits and perceptions regarding influencer marketing

− Respondents' motivations for following SMIs are diverse: to find inspiration, to be entertained, to discover new things, to keep them informed, etc.

− Certain fears were expressed about the promotion of certain products or services by SMIs, such as medicines, financial investments and surgical procedures. Some respondents also denounced the promotion of poor-quality products, counterfeits, scams and drop shipping.

Consumers' buying experience with influencer marketing

− Respondents' motivations for following SMIs are diverse: to find inspiration, to be entertained, to discover new things, to keep them informed, etc.

− Certain fears were expressed about the promotion of certain products or services by SMIs, such as medicines, financial investments and surgical procedures. Some respondents also denounced the promotion of poor-quality products, counterfeits, scams and drop shipping.

− Respondents' main motivations for buying products or services recommended by a SMI are: discount, attractive advertising and visuals, product appreciation, curiosity and repeated exposure to the advertisement.

− Some positive aspects of their purchasing experience were mentioned by respondents, such as the financial benefit, the quality of the products, the transparency of the SMI, the opportunity to discover a new brand, ...

− Negative aspects of the purchasing experience were also mentioned, such as delivery times, misleading advertising, poor quality products, etc. However, despite their sometimes-negative experiences, most respondents intend to follow SMI recommendations again.

− Consumers' opinions of SMIs were influenced by their purchasing experiences, with positive experiences leading to neutral or positive opinions, and negative experiences resulting in disappointment and potential unfollowing.

− Most respondents indicated that the trust they place in a SMI is not impacted by the fact that he or she is paid to advertise. Indeed, seven respondents explain that this will depend mainly on the trust they initially place in the SMI.

Dangers of influencer marketing for brands according to consumers

- According to consumers, influencer marketing can damage a brand's image in the event of bad buzz linked to the SMI, misuse of the promotional technique or because of an inconsistency between the brand and the SMI.
- Some consumers believe that a lack of control over a SMI's content can damage a brand's image and reputation.
- Overuse of influencer marketing can be detrimental to a brand's credibility and authenticity, according to consumers.
- Some consumers say that overlapping partnerships can damage the brand's image, reflecting a lack of consistency, but also their trust and loyalty to the SMI. The latter would express doubts as to the sincerity of the SMI's motivations.
- According to respondents, influencer marketing negatively affects their behaviour through compulsive buying. In addition, some believe that this technique damages the psychological health of subscribers, particularly the youngest and most vulnerable. Finally, overuse of influencer marketing by brands could also curb consumers' purchasing intentions, and produce a negative attitude towards brands and SMIs.

4.2 Analysis of marketing experts: Evaluation and use of influencer marketing by professionals

4.2.1 Experts' experience with influencer marketing

At the start of the interview, marketing experts were asked about their experience with influencer marketing, with the aim of understanding their profile and expertise in this field.

First, respondents were queried about their use of influencer marketing. Among the five individuals interviewed, only one had never engaged in this type of marketing. The reason provided was that the marketing agency she works for does not endorse influencer marketing due to concerns regarding its potential reputation damage. Additionally, she mentioned that the substantial sums paid to SMIs in exchange for publicity do not yield effective results. Among the remaining four experts, three acknowledged occasional usage of influencer marketing. One respondent, serving as a brand director for a luxury brand, expressed that despite initially exploring the growing influence of SMIs, they soon recognized its associated risks, particularly when it comes to the expertise and credibility of SMIs. Consequently, they restricted collaborations to only three SMIs per year who possessed expertise in their respective fields and catered to a specific niche. Another respondent, functioning as a social media marketing consultant, disclosed a consistent incorporation of influencer marketing. However, he emphasized that it only accounts for only 10% of the annual sales. In summary, it is evident that influencer marketing is not extensively embraced by the respondents. The primary motives cited for employing influencer marketing were to enhance visibility, raise awareness, and stimulate additional sales.

As for the procedure followed before starting a collaboration with a SMI, three respondents consider it important to find out about the person beforehand, in order to limit the risks associated with a failed campaign. The criteria studied included audience profile, the geographic area in which he or she operates, engagement rate, tone of voice and the capabilities he or she might have to achieve the marketing campaign's objectives.

Next, respondents were asked to describe the results of the influencer marketing campaigns they had run. One respondent indicated that the campaign objectives were achieved one time out of two, sometimes in view of the initial requirements being a little too high. On the whole, the results achieved were an increase in visibility, brand awareness, website traffic, the number of subscribers on social medias or a financial return. However, one respondent, working in the luxury sector, stated that no direct impact had been observed, but explained that he had never seen cause and effect in the marketing campaigns carried out in his sector, due to its specific nature. He explains that the aim of these campaigns was to gain notoriety among young adults, in order to entice them to consume the brand in the future.

Marketing experts who had already used SMIs were then asked to rate their satisfaction with these campaigns. Of the four respondents, three said they were satisfied most of the time, although two reported problems with SMIs misspelling the brand. Finally, one respondent said he was satisfied one time out of two.

Respondents were then asked if they had ever expressed any doubts about one or more SMIs with whom they wished to collaborate. One respondent explained that she had had doubts about the content published by the SMI, which might not be faithful to her requirements and the brand's identity. Another said she had already had doubts about the reliability and relevance of certain SMIs, in view of recent scandals on social medias. Finally, two respondents pointed out that in the early days of influencer marketing, there was very little control, and that abuses were recurrent.

The results provide an answer to the seventh research question, entitled "RQ7: What do marketing experts think about the world of influencer marketing". It seems that the use of this technique is fairly widespread among respondents, but by no means an important part of their marketing strategy. In addition to the positive aspects of influencer marketing, such as improving visibility and brand awareness and boosting sales, these experts also recognize its risky nature. As a result, careful evaluation of SMIs prior to collaboration is deemed crucial to achieving campaign objectives. Despite some concerns, the experts largely expressed satisfaction with the campaigns carried out. In conclusion, the findings underline the importance of careful SMI selection, clear objectives and effective follow-up to maximize the potential benefits of influencer marketing.

4.2.2   Benefits of influencer marketing according to experts in the field

During the interviews, two respondents highlighted a number of advantages of influencer marketing. The first of these is brand awareness, which is sometimes boosted after a single-channel influencer marketing campaign, i.e., one dedicated solely to promotion by social media influencers. One respondent explains that this type of brand awareness is particularly prevalent in certain sectors such as lifestyle, beauty, fashion, sport and FMCG, and points out that these are almost never companies active in B2B, but in B2C. However, the respondent insists that this type of campaign is very risky. Next, an expert points out that influencer marketing is one of the most cost-effective forms of promotion.

> *"It's extremely profitable. It's one of the most profitable types of marketing today. As a general rule, it's still very profitable, we're on 3 to 4 times, in other words, I pay 100 euros for a social media influencer, it brings me 300 to 400 euros in revenue, no profit. It's much higher than most channels."* - Respondent 4.

In addition to awareness, an advantage already identified in the literature review, we can add profitability as one of the benefits of influencer marketing. Moreover, we can also deduce that certain sectors, as mentioned above, are particularly prone to carrying out a successful influencer marketing campaign, whereas this won't necessarily be the case for companies active in B2B.

4.2.3 Marketing experts' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing for brands

4.2.3.1 Marketing experts' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing for brand image

The experts were asked to name and explain certain actions carried out by SMIs or by the brand that could have negative consequences for the latter's image.

First and foremost, all respondents indicated that influencer marketing can be detrimental to a brand's image and, at the same time, discredit it, when it does not choose the right SMIs to represent it. To reduce this risk, marketing experts have come up with a number of tips. First of all, the SMI must be in line with the brand's values, positioning and tone of voice. As an example, one respondent explained that if a premium brand uses a more popular type of SMI, the brand image will be damaged. Secondly, some respondents advise brands to collaborate with SMIs specialized in the same field as the brand, in order to preserve its image and communicate the right message to the right target.

> *"For me, a brand that has a good image, if it uses a certain type of social media influencer who collaborates with anything and everything as a brand, they lose credibility because they don't have a defined sector, sectors with which they have a certain affinity. For me, this brand loses credibility because this person isn't reliable, given that he or she promotes anything and everything. As far as I'm concerned, this is detrimental to the brand's image and DNA."* - Respondent 2.

Secondly, some respondents mention the risk of bad buzz or scandal directed at the SMI, which could damage the brand's image, given that the SMI represents the brand and is associated with it in the eyes of consumers. Afterwards, one respondent also explained that a brand's image could be threatened if it runs a campaign on the wrong communication channel.

In view of the results obtained, we can answer the third research question entitled "RQ3: How influencer marketing affects brand image negatively?" from the point of view of marketing experts. We can affirm that to preserve its image, a brand must pay particular attention to the choice of its communication channel as well as its SMIs. It must select individuals who share the same values, positioning and tone of voice, but who are also active in a field of expertise relevant to its business sector, in order to remain credible and to share the right message. As a result, marketing experts seem to agree that a SMI's expertise is an important aspect to take into account, which is in line with the observations of Djafarova and Rushworth (2017). Indeed, these researchers considered that this trait strengthened consumer confidence in SMI recommendations. Consequently, the observations made during these interviews diverge from those conducted by Lou and Yuan (2018), who found no influence between these two variables. Finally, it is also important to find out about the background and reputation of the SMIs with whom you wish to collaborate, in order to limit the risks associated with bad buzz or scandal.

4.2.3.2 Marketing experts' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing for brand's credibility and authenticity

One of the dangers identified by a respondent for brand credibility is hiring SMIs who are not experts in any field and who are used to promoting many different products. This expert insists that promoting a brand via this type of SMI can damage its credibility.

4.2.3.3 Marketing experts' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing for brand awareness

When it comes to the dangers of influencer marketing on brand awareness, the opinions of marketing experts differ. First of all, one risk cited is, once again, the choice of a SMI who doesn't correspond to the brand and its values, potentially sending the wrong message to the target, or sending a message to the wrong target. One respondent explained that a brand's awareness can only be amplified, but that it can be amplified with the wrong audience, damaging its visibility with the right one. Two respondents, however, take a different view. For these experts, influencer marketing can have no real negative impact on brand awareness, because advertising has a short-term impact. Indeed, given the number of advertising messages imposed on consumers every day, one of the two respondents explains that consumers forget quickly and forgive very easily. As a result, these respondents believe that a brand can bounce back easily with a good communications strategy.

> "*A brand is cynical. The day their social media influencer makes a racist statement, the brand isn't going to say, "Oh, we're doing the backstabbing". No, the brand is going to say 'There is a communication opportunity here, I'm going to be able to denounce my contract and get great visibility because I've made it clear to the media that there's no way we're going to associate ourselves with these remarks and that we're going to stop working with this social media influencer'. And that is just one more opportunity to boost brand awareness. Brands manage to do judo with everything. So, it is pretty impressive.*" - Respondent 4

In view of the results, we can provide some answers to the fourth research question, entitled: "RQ4: How influencer marketing affects brand awareness negatively?". The answer to this question needs to be qualified, because we can see two schools of thought regarding the dangers of influencer marketing on brand awareness. On the one hand, selecting the wrong SMIs could damage brand awareness by spreading the wrong message or targeting the wrong audience. On the other hand, since advertising only has a short-term effect, and consumers don't have a good memory, a brand has nothing to fear in terms of its reputation, provided it has a good communications strategy. However, it is worth specifying that an expert is in agreement with both schools.

4.2.3.4 Marketing experts' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing concerning misleading practices

The practice of deceptive tactics is a risk in influencer marketing cited by two respondents. One of them explains that such practices can take many forms, from buying subscribers, likes or comments, to using a bot to increase engagement rates. This respondent denounces these practices as counter-productive, not only because they are increasingly detected, but also because they harm the brand represented by the social media influencer. However, this respondent explains that more and more tools are available to detect fraud, thus encouraging SMIs not to engage in deceptive practices. Nevertheless, this proves the importance of studying and analysing social media influencer profiles, in order to detect all forms of fraud, before committing to a collaboration with them.

> *"Another risk is fraud, of course. If a social media influencer has defrauded or will defraud before or after your campaign. No matter how much you tell yourself 'we've checked, he's super clean', you don't know how he or she will behave afterwards. And yet, once the social media influencer is associated with the brand, he or she remains associated with the brand for the final target. So, in hindsight, there may be a risk, which brands don't always understand. We're not only paying, I think, for the past, for the audience, we're also paying for an attitude and we're trying to guarantee that the future will be clean too."* - Respondent 4

These results provide some answers to the sixth research question: "RQ6: Do marketing experts see any dangers in influencer marketing?". In addition to the risks to brand image and reputation, or to consumer behaviour, the use of deceptive techniques seems to represent an additional danger for brands wishing to run an influencer marketing campaign.

4.2.3.5 Marketing experts' perception of the dangers of influencer marketing concerning consumer behaviour

Marketing experts were then asked to name actions or risks that could negatively impact consumer behaviour. The first, cited by four respondents, is the misuse of influencer marketing. According to the two respondents, this misuse creates an impression of brand suspicion, which reflects an unreliable image. On the same subject, another respondent points out that a repetitive message is more effective than a single one, given that the consumer won't necessarily act on the first advertising message. However, he insists on the fact that we must not exceed the limit of what the consumer can bear, and that to do so, we must take care to vary the content in terms of visuals, channels, social media influencers, ...

> *"Too much influencer marketing kills influencer marketing. A brand that misuses influencer marketing is an unreliable brand. It raises doubts. I think influencer marketing has certainly proved its worth, but overuse undermines the very benefits that could be derived from it. And so, for me, it has the opposite effect."* - Respondent 2.

Then, again, several experts mentioned a risk linked to the choice of SMI, who might either not fit in with the brand and in that case upset consumers, or who might displease consumers, resulting in a potential boycott of the brand. Finally, one expert points out that influencer marketing can lead to compulsive buying, while another explains that consumption patterns are becoming more thoughtful, which has an influence on a company's sales.

In addition to the answers provided by consumers, other elements can be brought to bear on the fifth research question "RQ5: How influencer marketing affects consumer behaviour negatively?". Surprisingly, marketing experts share similar findings as consumers regarding the negative impact of influencer marketing on purchase intent. Excessive use of this type of marketing, impulse buying and inappropriate choice of SMIs can all contribute to negative consumer behaviour, underlining the importance of a thoughtful, balanced approach to influencer marketing strategies.

4.2.3.6   Other dangers of influencer marketing for marketing experts

First of all, one respondent, a consultant and trainer in content marketing and social medias, as well as a digital project manager, cites a confidentiality risk linked to influencer marketing. He explains that when a campaign is set up, the SMI is briefed on the brand, the internal context in which the advertising will take place, the pricing policy, ... As a result, there is a risk of confidential information leaking out.

Secondly, one respondent, a brand director, points out that influencer marketing does not allow access to a great deal of reliable data. He explains that although a SMI boasts about his reach and influence, it is impossible to know in advance the repercussions of the campaign, which could be on sales, brand awareness, image, ... He also adds that it is very complicated to measure the impact of an influencer marketing campaign afterwards.

Consequently, in addition to the deceptive practices carried out by some social media influencers, the leakage of confidential information and the lack of accessibility to reliable data appear to be other dangers identified by respondents, helping to complete the following research question: "RQ6: Do marketing experts see any dangers in influencer marketing?".

4.2.4   Marketing experts' prediction of the evolution of influencer marketing

Marketing experts were asked to describe how they thought influencer marketing would evolve, and what they would recommend to preserve it.

Influencer marketing has experienced strong growth in recent years. Of the five respondents interviewed, only one believes this growth will continue. For the other four, influencer marketing will evolve in a different direction and will no longer remain as it is today. Several hypotheses were put forward. Firstly, for two respondents, this type of marketing will move towards user-generated content. The reasons behind their hypothesis are that the success of influencer marketing has proved that consumers believe their peers more than brands, which is explained by the credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Freiden, 1984; Ohanian, 1991; Erdogan, 1999), and that in the future, this practice will be carried out by smaller SMIs, closer to the consumer. Next, two respondents explain that influencer marketing will become more conscious, ethical and authentic, mainly due to the excesses observed in recent years and consumers' annoyance regarding the frequency with which they are subjected to advertising. The respondent also explains that collaborations will be more long-term and that one-shot campaigns[18] will be less common. Next, one respondent explains that at the advent of influencer marketing, brands didn't have as much knowledge as they do today, and therefore social media influencers had the power. However, he explains that with today's knowledge, brands will regain control. Finally, one respondent explains that influencer marketing is becoming more

---

[18] One-shot campaigns consist of a single influencer marketing action, which is therefore based on the short term, in order to achieve rapid results.

professional, thanks in particular to fraud prevention tools. Nevertheless, he insists on the need to remain wary, as this is a risky industry.

> *"And the smartest influencers are doing this, that is, not going to be judged off the cuff on a one-shot but will work over a year or a series of campaigns with brands. (...). But it's important to distinguish between those who are there just to twist the game and those who are there on a long-term basis and, above all, have a healthy mix, i.e., out of 100% of my influencer posts, I have, for example, 5 to 10% that are promotional. The rest is my content. They're quickly tempted to go up to 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, and let's not even talk about starlets, who are at 80% right from the start and only post what pays. Except that they damage their own personal brand, because you realize that there's no soul and that there's little point in following these people. As a result, they're forced to go for ever deeper discounts and more aggressive actions. So, they're all about one-shots. At some point, they burn out and we move on to the next starlet."* - Respondent 4

When it comes to how influencer marketing can be preserved, several tips were put forward by the experts. Firstly, they advise brands to turn to SMIs with a smaller community, considered more authentic and closer to the consumer. Moreover, by selecting nano or micro SMIs, the brand reduces the risk of bad buzz occurring during or after the campaign, as the latter are less well known to the public. In addition to this, it was also suggested to turn to SMIs considered experts in their field of expertise, in order to bring an objective and constructive opinion to consumers. This observation is consistent with the findings of various research studies that have shown that consistency between a product and a SMI can positively influence consumers' purchase intentions (Shimp, 2000; Pradhan et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2017) as well as their attitudes towards advertising (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Lim et al., 2017). Next, experts also advise collaborating with "content creator" type of social media influencers, having a consistent guideline, collaborating with the same type of brand and promoting complementary products. In terms of strategy, one respondent suggests selecting several nano or micro SMIs and committing to a long-term collaboration. Finally, one respondent believes that for influencer marketing to endure, it needs to focus more on data, enabling more in-depth analysis.

> *"What's important to me for the future is the notion of authenticity. In other words, and this isn't just related to influencer marketing but to marketing in general, people are fed up and have become blind to a certain amount of advertising. And I understand, I really do. So, we're going to have to find other ways of communicating with them, without forcing them, without raping them, as I often say, because advertising tends to rape consumers. And that's why I believe that the best SMIs will stand out from the crowd, because they will have become creators of value-added content. So, just having: "Buy this is great", "If you buy this, you get 15% off if you swipe up before tomorrow and use the promo code". That's all dead to me. In any case, that's not where I'd recommend going, but rather giving content creators more confidence, giving them the means to create quality content that brings something to the web user. I no longer believe in the brand that's going to bludgeon, but in the brand, that's going to help and inspire, also inform the targets, but not that's going to hit, spam or rape the user. I think there's going to be a change in the tone of influencer campaigns, that we're also going to see a shift towards SMIs who are more authentic, smaller, more conversational with their target."* - Respondent 4

Based on the results obtained, we can provide some answers to the ninth research question, entitled "RQ9: How to make influencer marketing last?". According to the experts, influencer marketing is not going to disappear any time soon, but is likely to experience a turning point in the next few years. According to most respondents, we will see marketing that is more authentic, ethical, professional and focused on the long term. As far as social media influencers are concerned, one specific profile is likely to stand out. Nano and micro SMIs are likely to attract many brands thanks to their authenticity and closeness to their community. It seems to be also a good idea to turn to content

creator, who can provide brands with real added value in terms of publication quality, research and creativity. Finally, it is also advisable to collaborate with SMIs who are considered experts in their field, in order to limit the risks to credibility and brand image, but also to reach the target audience directly.

4.2.5 Summary of interviews: Marketing experts' perceptions and experience of influencer marketing

A summary of the most important observations made during the qualitative interviews with marketing experts is given below:

Marketing experts' habits and opinions regarding influencer marketing

− Of the five experts interviewed, only one had never used influencer marketing.

− The main objectives of their influencer marketing campaign were to improve brand visibility, awareness, and to boost sales.

− The results of the campaigns were varied: an increase in visibility, brand awareness, traffic to the brand's website, subscribers on social networks and a financial return. A different impact has been observed in the luxury sector, due to the specific nature of the target.

− Three out of four experts are generally satisfied with their influencer marketing campaigns, although a few problems are noted, such as SMIs spelling the brand incorrectly.

Dangers of influencer marketing for brands according to marketing experts

− According to the experts, influencer marketing can damage a brand's image by choosing the wrong SMIs. As a result, the experts stress the importance of carefully selecting SMIs. This is why some recommend choosing someone in line with the brand's values, or selecting SMIs specialising in the same field. Moreover, certain criteria such as audience profile, geographical area, rate of engagement and tone of voice were mentioned.

− Some respondents indicate that influencer marketing can be detrimental to brand awareness due to incorrect audience targeting. However, the short-term effect of advertising limits the potential damage.

− Certain deceptive practices are denounced by experts, such as the purchase of followers, likes, etc., which is why it is so important to analyse SMIs' profiles in depth.

− Consumer behaviour can be negatively impacted by influencer marketing for various reasons, such as: abusive use, choice of SMIs that are incompatible or displeasing to the target, compulsive buying.

− Other risks were also mentioned, such as the leakage of confidential information or the lack of access to reliable data.

Marketing experts' perception of the evolution of influencer marketing

− Of the five experts interviewed, only one believes that the growth of influencer marketing will continue. Some think that this technique will evolve into UGC, while others believe that it will become more authentic and ethical. Finally, some experts also explain that influencer marketing will become more professional.

− To preserve influencer marketing, experts recommend that brands use nano or micro SMIs, who are considered experts in their field, favor content creators and create long-term partnerships.

4.3 Social media influencers analysis: Roles, responsibilities and perceptions in influencer marketing

This dissertation deals with the dangers of influencer marketing for brands, which make it a sensitive subject to broach with social media influencers. However, another topic can be addressed, namely their vision of this type of marketing, the complicated situations, both with brands and with their followers, that they have been confronted with, its impact on their well-being, ...

4.3.1 Social media influencers' personal view of influencer marketing

At the start of the interview, the SMIs were asked about their vision of influencer marketing. Two SMIs explain that they avoid showing a false image of themselves, and that they pay particular attention to being as authentic as possible. Then, another SMI points out that it's a very delicate, long-term type of marketing for SMIs who need to create a link with their community in order to be credible in their eyes. Then, one SMI explains that she doesn't like the word "social media influencer", as she considers that influencing someone is not positive. Instead, she assumes that she is trying to inspire her subscribers, to pull them up through the information she shares. Finally, the last person sees influencer marketing as the new advertising. She explains that, unlike other means of communication such as radio or television, influencer marketing enables consumers to benefit from advertising personalized to their taste, which is supported by the homophily principle (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). Moreover, the latter also indicates that a consumer will be more likely to trust a person they feel they know, rather than a brand. This phenomenon is based on the theory of parasocial interaction, explained earlier in the literature review. As a reminder, this theory demonstrates that the intimate bond created between the follower and the SMI thanks to their numerous interactions (Lou, 2021), has a positive impact on his or her credibility and reliability (Kim & Song, 2016; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Ong et al., 2022).

"I say it's a bit like the new ad. I find that TV and radio ads have much less impact because, in my opinion at least, people don't identify with them. And what I like about influencer marketing on social medias is that I'm much more tempted to trust a girl that I follow, that I feel I know, or who is a friend even though I don't know her. And the fact that she's going to talk about a product, because I'm the one who's already taking the step of following her, so where television or advertising is imposed on you, you don't have a choice. It would be funny if on television you could say "I want the ads to be more about this, that and the other", but that's not the case. So, I find that for influencer marketing, even if the ad is sent to you without you really being asked anything, it's already more targeted so it's much more personal." - Respondent 4

Although this topic was not addressed directly, two SMIs mentioned some positive aspects of this type of marketing. As far as brands are concerned, the respondents explained that influencer marketing allows them to boost their advertising, better target their communication and improve the persuasiveness of their advertising messages. Secondly, as far as SMIs are concerned, it enables them to discover brands and meet people.

More negative aspects were also cited by the respondents. Firstly, some of them denounce certain SMIs, most of them from French reality TV, who, in their view, stain the profession by not doing things properly, notably by promoting any kind of product, sometimes dangerous to health, or by carrying out misleading advertising. One of the respondents refers to this category of SMIs as "billboards", a remark already made previously by one of the consumers interviewed to designate SMIs. As a result, type of SMI seems to have built up a reputation that will probably be hard to shake off. Secondly, two female SMIs highlight the dangers of social medias and influencer marketing, particularly for young teenagers, who may be tempted to buy useless and even dangerous products, an observation echoed in consumer responses. This comment could imply that better control of influencer marketing practices would be desirable. One SMI even confides in us about a misleading product she promoted in her early days. Thirdly, two SMIs explain that the judgment of others is omnipresent on social medias, and another denounces the lack of recognition of the profession.

The results provide an interesting approach to influencer marketing, and answer the eighth research question "RQ8: What do social media influencers think about the world of influencer marketing?". This promotional technique is seen as a form of personalized advertising, in line with consumers' interests. On the one hand, some value authenticity and the relationship they have with their subscribers. On the other hand, the term "influence", seen as negative, also seems to disturb. Some negative consequences of influencer marketing were also highlighted, such as the promotion of dubious products and risks for young consumers. It seems that more controlled regulation and better recognition of the profession is needed. The results underline the complexity of influence marketing and call for ethical and transparent practices.

4.3.2   Social media influencers' experience with followers

First of all, the relationship that SMIs have with their followers was studied during the interview. On the whole, the SMIs explained that they had a relationship of trust with their community, and even a friendly relationship, as one might have with one's friends.

Next, the SMIs were asked what impact they felt they had on their community. Overall, they explained that they provide their subscribers with advice, motivate them, improve their self-confidence or, for one SMI, influence their habits to make them more sustainable. Each SMI interviewed think and hope to have a positive impact on their community.

As explained by two of the SMIs, judgment on social medias is omnipresent, and social media influencers, exposing many aspects of their lives, are not spared. Some of the respondents say they occasionally receive remarks or criticism from a few followers who don't share the same vision, opinion or conviction as they do. One of them said she had even been insulted once. Finally, one SMI explains that she receives criticism about her looks.

4.3.3 Social media influencers' experience with brands

Before accepting a collaboration with a brand, many social media influencers take certain criteria into account. If these criteria are met, then there is a good chance that the SMI will accept the partnership request. During the interview, the respondents were asked to list these selection criteria. First of all, the most frequently cited criterion was the consistency between the remuneration offered by the brand and the request made by the latter. If the request proves too high in relation to the remuneration, four of the five SMIs questioned will refuse the contract. Next, the social media influencer's interest in the brand and the complementarity of its values with those of the SMI are also two criteria considered important by three respondents. Finally, one respondent will refuse a collaboration if the brand offers drop-shipped products or if the request is not personalized to her work and personality.

> *"So, my positioning in relation to brands is really to say 'Listen, I'm not going to denature myself'. So, I'm not going to enter a world that isn't me. I almost got a big contract with a brand that really wanted to put me in the kitchen. But when I say in the kitchen, I mean in the kitchen, cooking, making dishes and so on. I said 'Guys, I'm not being consistent here'. I've already turned them down because I didn't want to be associated with a brand that didn't suit me. I've turned them down because the price was too ridiculously low and I said 'Look, I'm sorry, but this just doesn't make sense'. I've already turned them down because they were too greedy, so the brand interested me, the budget was interesting. But in fact, what happened was that afterwards, you realize that in the contract they're asking you for four times as much and I say' no, that's not the deal'."* - Respondent 1

Respondents were also asked about situations they had experienced with brands that they considered difficult. For two of them, relations and exchanges with the agency, which acts as intermediary between the brand and the SMI, are sometimes difficult. Two respondents also complained about late payment. Then, one respondent explained that she had already experienced the brand's failure to respect the contract and her initial request, which prompted her to terminate the contract. This observation tells brands that it is very important to be clear about the demands they make of the SMI, so as to avoid any constraints during the marketing campaign. After that, one SMI deplores the fact that some brands do not take her experience and expertise into account. Indeed, the SMI is in direct contact with his or her community, and knows it far better than a brand wishing to target this specific community. As a result, it is essential for a brand to trust its SMI when it comes to their followers' preferences and what might, or might not, appeal to them. Finally, two SMIs say they have never experienced a really complicated situation with brands.

> *"Two or three weeks ago, we negotiated a creative position instead of a video, because I had a really great idea. So, I produce everything, I obviously commit funds because there are materials to buy. Then the woman went on vacation and her replacement said no. So, I proposed several photos and she said she says 'I want the first one to be with the cream on my face' I say 'well no, I know my community well and I know that they're going to commit to a creative post' and so inevitably, the algorithm means that the more commitment you get, the more you're inevitably seen. And so, she said 'yes but no', she insisted and so I was really disappointed, I withdrew my creative photo because I didn't think it deserved to be second because I knew it was going to have a great impact. Obviously, the creative post I made a few days later took precedence over what they wanted me to post. Afterwards, subconsciously, I was still a little disappointed because I had to look at the flop it made and say to myself 'you warned them'. So yes, those are the sides that are a little less friendly with brands when they try to change what you're about because when you have a real relationship of trust with your community and you know it very well, you know what will appeal and you know how to put a brand forward."* - Respondent 2

4.3.4 Impact of influencer marketing on SMIs' well being

As explained in the literature review, social media influencers can feel a lot of pressure when it comes to the number of likes they generate, the number of followers they count, ... To remain attractive to brands, SMIs must therefore ensure they keep these numbers high. In this respect, two respondents say that it affects their well-being. Secondly, the fact of posting publicly on social medias means that a SMI is likely to be recognized in the street, judged or even attacked for his or her choices or actions, ... This second aspect affects all respondents, who note an impact on their well-being or mental health. Two respondents also explained that they didn't feel legitimate when they started out, while one said that the profession had already had a negative impact on her family, due to the lack of her absence justified by influencer marketing.

These results show that the profession of social media influencer can have repercussions on the mental health and well-being of those who practice it. The pressure of statistics, the exposure of one's private life and the feeling of not being legitimate are all factors to be taken into account before embarking on this profession.

4.3.5 Summary of interviews: Influencers' perceptions and experience of influencer marketing

A summary of the most important observations made during the qualitative interviews with social media influencers is given below:

SMIs' vision of influencer marketing

− The SMIs interviewed value authenticity and feel they have a relationship of trust with their community.

− The advantages of influencer marketing cited by SMIs are: improved advertising, precise targeting, persuasive messages.

− Negative aspects of this promotional technique were also raised by some respondents, such as the risks for young consumers who might be tempted to buy products that are useless or dangerous for themselves. Secondly, some respondents criticised a category of SMIs, namely reality TV SMIs, who, in their opinion, tarnish the reputation of influencer marketing. Two respondents explained that the judgement of others on social networks is complicated to manage. Finally, one respondent denounced a lack of recognition for the profession.

− Respondents indicated that influencer marketing can sometimes be detrimental to their well-being, in various ways such as: pressure to maintain statistics, public exposure, judgement by others.

SMIs' experience with brands

− Respondents cite a number of criteria that are taken into account before entering into a partnership with a brand, such as: remuneration, demand, interest in the brand, complementarity with the brand's values. Finally, one respondent said that she refused drop shipping brands or partnership requests that were considered impersonal.

− Some respondents indicated that they had already had complicated relationships with certain brands due to marketing agencies, late payment, failure to respect contracts or a lack of consideration for the influencer's expertise.

4.4 Comparative analysis: Perceptions of the dangers of influencer marketing according to consumers, marketing experts and social media influencers

After the analyse of the opinions of each individual from the three respondent groups, this section now compares the perceptions of these individuals, considering them as a single group. The aim of this section is therefore to carry out a comparative analysis of the results obtained during the qualitative interviews concerning the dangers of influencer marketing. To this end, a concept map was created, grouping together all the dangers cited by respondents during the interviews. This analysis technique provides a visual representation of the relationships between different concepts, making it easier to understand processes (Lanzing, 1996). Furthermore, concept maps offer flexibility in their design, making them valuable tools for qualitative researchers to organize research, condense data, identify thematic patterns and communicate their findings effectively (Daley, 2004). As a result, the concept map below offers a clear visualization of the relationships between the dangers of influencer marketing identified by consumers, marketing experts and social media influencers.

Initially, several dangers associated with influencer marketing were identified by participants, including its impact on brand image and consumer behaviour. Inconsistency between SMIs' areas of expertise and the brand, lack of trust between stakeholders, misuse of the technique and inappropriate choice of communication channels were all cited as factors explaining the negative impact of influencer marketing on brand image. Respondents also mentioned the occurrence of bad buzz as a cause for concern, supported by Leung et al. (2022), who explain that such scandals can have a direct impact on brand image. Inconsistency between the SMI and the brand also proves to be a cause cited by many respondents, which happens to be supported by Lim et al. (2017) considering that consistency between the product, and indirectly the brand, and the social media influencer is a necessary condition for a successful marketing campaign.

Then, factors negatively influencing consumer behaviour included compulsive buying, negative repercussions on their mental health, inconsistency between SMIs' discourses and their actions, excessive promotions, dislike of SMIs, as well as disproportionate conditions of participation in advertising actions. Once again, the lack of coherence between the SMI and the brand was cited by some respondents as one of the causes that can adversely affect consumer behaviour. As explained in the literature review, selecting SMIs who don't match the promoted brand can have a negative impact on consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes (Shimp, 2000; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Pradhan et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2017). Finally, some respondents also pointed out that the poor quality of ads produced by SMIs tended to have a negative impact on their behaviour, as consumers, demonstrating the importance of mutual trust between the brand and SMI, as well as clear communication on published content.

Finally, some respondents denounced certain deceptive practices carried out by social media influencers, which could have a negative impact on the brand with which he or she collaborates. As Ferina et al. (2021) explain, these actions can have harmful consequences for the brand, which becomes a victim of the SMI's actions, making its marketing campaign ineffective. For these reasons, and as advised by some respondents as well as by Anand et al. (2019), it is essential for brands to check the profile of SMIs with whom it wishes to collaborate, in order to rule out any risk of deceptive practices. In addition, the lack of control over content creation is a danger identified, both by some authors, but also by respondents, deeming it risky if the message disseminated is wrong or the advertising is poorly executed. In such cases, this can represent a source of confusion for consumers, making the brand more difficult to remember (Chang, 2018) and affecting the credibility of the recommendation (Berthon et al., 2008). Furthermore, some respondents mentioned that the promotion of various products by SMIs, competing or not, in a relatively short period of time, could damage a brand's marketing campaign. Indeed, Ferina et al. (2021) support this observation, which

the authors suggest could result in only short-term, and sometimes insignificant, improvement for the brand. Finally, some respondents also mentioned other risks, such as the lack of reliable data or possible leaks of confidential information.

This conceptual analysis highlights the various dangers of influencer marketing identified by participants, and provides an overview of the issues that can arise in this field. The results provide valuable information for understanding the risks associated with influencer marketing, and underline the importance of properly managing this practice in order to preserve the brand and protect consumer interests. Moreover, the comparison of results between consumers, marketers and social media influencers reveals a remarkable degree of concordance. Their responses often converge, and even overlap at times. This convergence reinforces the credibility of the observations and underlines the importance of considering these different perspectives for a better understanding of the negative impact of influencer marketing for brands.

Figure 2. Dangers of influencer marketing (own image)

Mismatch between the brand and the SMI

Use of the wrong communication channel

Abusive use of influencer marketing

Bad buzz or scandal about the SMI

Lack of trust between the three stakeholders

Inconsistency between SMI and brand areas of expertise

Brand overlap

Lack of access to relevant data

Brand image

Brand's credibility and authenticity

Brand awareness

Dangers of influencer marketing

Misleading practices by SMI

Confidentiality issues

Consumer behavior

Lack of control over content

Compuslive purchases

Negative impact on consumers' psychological health

Inconsistency between what SMI says and what it does

Poorly exectuted ad

Excessive promotions

Dislike of the SMI

Demands too high to participate in sales action

5 CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSIONS

The aim of the following discussion is to compare and relate the results obtained from the qualitative study with the information gathered in the literature review. This discussion highlights the dangers of influencer marketing for brands, consumers and SMIs.

5.1 Dangers of influencer marketing for brands

Firstly, the results of the study reflect the importance of the choice of the SMI. Indeed, the brand must choose an individual consistent with its values, image, identity, positioning and tone of voice. Otherwise, the brand runs the risk of damaging its image, notably by communicating the wrong message or targeting the wrong audience. Indeed, this consistency between the brand and the SMI is considered as a necessary condition by Lim et al. (2017) for a successful marketing campaign. Moreover, these results concur with those of numerous researchers (e.g., Shimp, 2000; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Pradhan et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2017) demonstrating that this consistency positively influenced consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes towards advertising. In addition to its image, the results of the study show that a brand could also damage its credibility by collaborating with SMIs whose habit is to promote products of all kinds. They are therefore advised to select SMIs who are considered experts in their field and have a strict code of conduct. Secondly, a mistake in the selection of SMIs could also damage the relationship with consumers, notably by irritating them and provoking a potential boycott of the brand. Finally, the findings of the study indicate that an inconsistency between the brand and the SMI can be detrimental to the company's reputation, due to the amplification of the advertising message with the wrong target, indirectly damaging its visibility with the desired audience. However, this observation needs to be nuanced, as the results also show that influencer marketing does not represent a risk to brand awareness, given the short-term effect of advertising and the number of advertising messages imposed on consumers every day. In conclusion, the choice of SMI is of crucial importance for a brand, since it could have serious consequences for its image, credibility, customer relations and, potentially, brand awareness.

Secondly, another danger mentioned in this survey is linked to the SMI's reputation. In a world where information circulates at breakneck speed, SMIs, exposing their lives to thousands or even millions of people on social medias, unfortunately can't protect themselves against a scandal or bad buzz breaking out. This reputational risk represents a danger to the brand's image, which will inevitably be associated with the SMI at the heart of a controversy. This observation ties in with that of Leung et al (2022), who suggest the use of virtual SMIs to eliminate this risk, as the brand retains full control over it. Other precautions can be taken by the brand, notably by assessing the social media influencer's profile, reputation and background.

Then, the study also points to brands' lack of control over content as a danger of influencer marketing. Indeed, image and reputation risks were highlighted in the event of a SMI's advertising being of poor quality, sharing the wrong message or failing to present products or services effectively. These findings complement the observations made by Berthon et al. (2008), Chang (2018) and Leung et al. (2022), explaining that inconsistency between the brand and the SMI could create confusion among consumers, altering their memory of the brand, questioning the SMI's credibility and the relevance of his or her recommendation, and finally undermining the effectiveness of the marketing campaign. This is why it is important to vary the types of advertising content, as recommended by one of the marketing experts interviewed. On the one hand, this will avoid irritating consumers, but it will also reduce the risk of a campaign being ineffective, if the chosen social network's algorithm changes.

Afterward, this study highlights the risks associated with misleading practices carried out by SMIs, whether through the purchase of followers, likes, comments or even the use of bots to increase engagement rates. It has been observed that these practices can be detrimental to the brand represented by the SMI in question. These observations complement those made by Ferina et al. (2019), who explained that such practices could result in an insignificant improvement for the brand collaborating with the SMI. For this reason, both this study and Anand et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of studying and analysing SMIs before starting a collaboration, in order to rule out all forms of fraud. In addition to misleading practices, this study shows that the promotion of sensitive products or services such as surgery, financial investments or even drug treatments are highly unpopular with consumers, who see it as irresponsible, unethical and making these too accessible. At the same time, this study highlights the rejection of the promotion of low-quality products, scams, counterfeit goods or drop shipping, which is highly rejected by consumers interviewed. Brands are therefore advised to carry out an in-depth analysis of the SMIs with whom they wish to collaborate, on the one hand to rule out all kinds of misleading practices, and on the other to ensure that the SMI is not involved in the promotion of sensitive or low-quality products, so as to avoid a consumer boycott that could damage their reputation.

Next, the study also shows that overlapping influencer marketing campaigns can be detrimental to a brand. Indeed, as SMIs are heavily solicited by different brands, it is common to observe on their accounts several sponsored publications or stories made on the same day. Moreover, a study proves that an individual is active on 7.2 social media platforms (We Are Social, 2023). As a result, marketing campaigns can potentially be drowned out by others, especially since stories generally last only 24 hours, and publications quickly find themselves buried on users' news feeds by hundreds of others. Furthermore, a superposition of sponsored content can lead to a lack of coherence for consumers, making its distinction from competitors less effective. In addition, the SMI could come under suspicion regarding his or her motives and credibility. Consequently, consumer engagement and conversion rates could be damaged. These findings support those of Ferina et al. (2021), who show that brand overlay can lead to improvements that are only short-term and sometimes even insignificant for brands.

Meanwhile, some of the dangers associated with the way influencer marketing was used were highlighted in this study. Firstly, the results show that abusive use of influencer marketing can not only be detrimental to a brand's image and credibility, but can also damage the brand's relationship with its consumers. A brand collaborating too often with SMIs would be seen as unreliable by consumers, who would become suspicious and less inclined to buy the promoted product or service. While a repetitive message is more effective than a single one, brands must be careful to vary the types of content they produce, so as not to turn consumers off. Finally, according to the results of the study, using the wrong communication channel can damage a brand's image. Brands are therefore advised not to overuse influencer marketing, and to vary the type of content they offer their target audience, as well as ensuring that the chosen communication channel is adapted to its audience. Secondly, the results show that a brand should not offer excessive promotions, at the risk of inducing a feeling of suspicion among consumers, who fear having to deal with an unreliable brand. Finally, the study recommends that brands ensure that the conditions for taking part in a contest on social medias are not too restrictive for consumers. If this is the case, their desire and motivation to act as the brand would wish will be affected.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the lack of access to reliable data to evaluate the campaign, and the risk of confidential information being leaked by the SMI, are other risks that marketers should take into account before launching an influencer marketing campaign. For this reason, it's important to frame the commercial relationship with the SMI in a contract, thus minimizing the risk of confidential information leaking out.

In addition, several researches indicate the consumers' lack of trust in sponsored publications (e.g., Bang & Lee, 2016; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2017), as they are unable to ascertain the SMI's motivations, which they suspect to be financial. Consequently, according to Lou and Yuan (2018), consumers would tend to doubt the authenticity and credibility of the SMI, which will have negative consequences on the effectiveness of advertising (Ducoffe, 1996). However, the results of this study do not fully support these observations. Indeed, in most cases, it appears that consumers do not doubt the veracity of a SMI's recommendation, even if the latter is paid, if he or she appears to be honest and transparent towards his community. This observation needs to be nuanced, but nevertheless demonstrates the importance that social media users place on the authenticity of SMIs.

Moreover, Ferina et al (2021) highlight in their study the risks associated with changes in social media algorithms, as new platforms emerge. This is a factor beyond the control of brands, which can affect SMI's engagement rates and consequently the success of an influencer marketing campaign.

Finally, Leung et al (2022) showed in their study that a single influencer marketing campaign was not enough to build customer loyalty, and that it was only useful for attracting new customers, but not for retaining existing ones. As a result, influencer marketing seems to have a limited performance in developing brand loyalty and consumer retention. To overcome this limitation of influencer marketing, some authors suggest maintaining consumer satisfaction and staying on the lookout for competitors in order to keep a competitive value proposition (Gustafsson et al., 2005), finding ways to build customer loyalty (Palmatier et al., 2019) and engaging them in brand communities (Adjei et al., 2010).

5.2   Dangers of influencer marketing for consumers

Although this thesis focuses on the dangers of influencer marketing for brands, this promotional technique can also have an impact on consumers.

Firstly, the results of this study indicate that influencer marketing is the author of compulsive purchases by consumers. Indeed, consumers could be strongly and quickly influenced to buy products or services they may not need, particularly young consumers, who are considered to be more vulnerable and manipulable. In addition, the annual report by We Are Social and Meltwater indicates that around half of Internet users aged between 16 and 24 go to social medias to find out about products or brands, the highest proportion of any age group (We Are Social, 2023). However, this is the main objective of all advertising: to inspire consumers, make them dream and encourage them to make a purchase. While consumers have a responsibility to guard against these marketing techniques, regulations designed to protect them from the influence of SMIs, such as prevention messages, could potentially reduce this risk.

Secondly, this study highlights the psychological and emotional dangers of influencer marketing for consumers. Indeed, many SMIs display an idealistic lifestyle and edit their pictures, which can affect consumers' self-confidence and their relationship with themselves. The results of the study show that this risk is more prevalent among younger individuals, who are, once again, more vulnerable consumers, especially as 27% of people aged between 16 and 24 follow SMIs, still the highest proportion among all age groups (We Are Social, 2023). These observations complement those of Boerman et al. (2017) denouncing the manipulable nature of influencer marketing, in the case of masked advertising, for consumers.

5.3   Dangers of influencer marketing for social media influencers

Brands and consumers are not the only victims of influencer marketing, which can also affect its main authors: social media influencers. The results of the study point to a first category of risks linked to the profession itself. By being public figures, SMIs expose themselves to the judgment of others, which can adversely affect their mental health. In addition, the results underline the lack of recognition of this profession, which is also tarnished by certain SMIs who bend the rules by ripping off their community. These results complement those obtained by Hudders & Chen Lou (2023) denouncing the pressure SMIs face to stand out in this highly competitive market, and the difficulties they experience in maintaining a measure of privacy.

Other dangers, not identified in the literature review, concern the SMI's relationship with the brand or marketing agency that hired him or her. The study shows that breaches of contract and lack of consideration for the SMI's expertise represent constraints of influencer marketing. These results indicate that influencer marketing should be further professionalized, notably through legislation, in the interests of both brands and SMIs.

6 CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary

At a time when influencer marketing is an established but highly controversial business practice, this dissertation explores the dangers that this technique imposes on its main users: brands. The research focuses primarily on practices that can affect a brand's image, credibility, awareness and customer relationship, but also on the dangers that influencer marketing can have on consumers and SMIs themselves.

In order to study this phenomenon effectively, a qualitative study was carried out using in-depth interviews with three groups. A total of 10 consumers, 5 marketing experts and 5 social media influencers were interviewed via semi-structured questionnaires. The sampling technique was based on non-probability sampling, and respondents were found on the basis of my personal network, by word-of-mouth, via Internet searches or on social medias. The data was then coded and analysed following an iterative approach, using the Nvivo qualitative analysis tool. The results were analysed in two stages. The first focused on an analysis according to the group to which the respondent belonged and according to the themes previously chosen, while the second aimed to analyse all results dealing with the dangers of influencer marketing, regardless of the group to which the respondent belonged. Thanks to these two analyses, numerous findings were identified.

First of all, the results of this research underline the importance of the process of choosing a SMI by marketers, which, if not done thoughtfully, could damage a brand's image, credibility, relationship with its consumers and potentially its reputation. Then, this study shows that brand image is linked to the SMI's reputation, which is threatened if he or she finds himself or herself singled out on social medias. Brands' lack of control over the content produced by SMIs is also a danger highlighted by this study, resulting in risks to image, reputation, brand awareness, credibility and campaign effectiveness (Berthon et al., 2008; Chang, 2018; Leung et al., 2022). However, as one of the marketing experts interviewed explained, current knowledge tends to reinforce this control, professionalising influencer marketing and reducing the risks for the brand. Furthermore, the results of the study stress the importance of verifying that a SMI is not involved in misleading practices that could negatively affect the brand, diminishing the effectiveness of its marketing campaign. In addition to misleading practices, influencer marketing can have a negative impact on a brand if its ads are drowned out by many others, sometimes those of competitors, creating inconsistency among consumers, reducing its uniqueness, engagement rate and conversion rate, and providing only short-term or even insignificant improvements. Another danger of influencer marketing illustrated in this study is the misuse of this technique, which can damage a brand's image, credibility and relationship with its customers. The research results also highlight other dangers for brands, such as the lack of access to reliable data, the risk of leaking confidential information, and changing algorithms.

Finally, influencer marketing poses risks not only for brands, but also for consumers and SMIs. Indeed, the results of the study show that influencer marketing can not only have an impact on consumers' psychological health, but also operate as a negative influence, particularly for young individuals, deemed more vulnerable and manipulable. Furthermore, this marketing practice can also be detrimental to SMIs, not only from a psychological point of view, but also in terms of recognition and consideration for the profession, which is in need of professionalization.

6.2   Managerial implications

First and foremost, an important finding of this research is that consumers highly value authenticity and transparency in SMIs, and are tired of being bombarded by rushed sponsored publications promoting low-quality products. Moreover, this research also shows that consumers are still influenced by this type of communication, but that they expect more consideration and professionalism from brands and SMIs.

Secondly, all marketers wishing to collaborate with social media influencers to promote products or services should study their profile beforehand. Indeed, this is an essential first step with a considerable influence on the success of the marketing campaign, involving the study of a large number of criteria. On the one hand, marketers need to ensure that the SMI is not involved in misleading practices such as buying subscribers, likes or similar. On the other hand, it is important to analyse the SMI's consistency with the brand in terms of image, values, positioning, tone of voice, but also the correspondence of his or her community with the brand's target audience. It is also advisable for the chosen SMI to be considered by his or her community as an expert in the field, which will increase the credibility of the ad. Afterwards, it is recommended, for long-term collaborations, to continue analysing the profile of the selected SMI, to ensure that the collaboration is still relevant.

Thirdly, in terms of the strategies adopted by brands, the results of this study show that influencer marketing is subject to renewal. It is suggested to collaborate with SMIs who are more authentic, but also closer to their audience, offering creative content and added value for both brands and consumers. Furthermore, one-shot collaborations no longer seem to be adapted to today's society, which places greater value on long-term partnerships. Hence, it is recommended that marketers shift their focus towards nano or micro SMIs, who are perceived as being more connected to consumers and actively involved in content creation, and establish long-term partnerships.

Fourthly, in addition to the SMI's profile, brands are well advised to vary the type of advertising content offered to consumers. Indeed, this study has shown that abusive use of influencer marketing is detrimental to brands, particularly in terms of credibility. Although influencer marketing has proven its effectiveness, marketers are advised not to focus their campaigns solely on influence, but to adopt a more diversified marketing approach.

As previously explained, the results of the study showed that consumers value authenticity and transparency. Apart from the fact that it is illegal, some brands prefer not to disclose the commercial nature of an ad, for fear of undermining its authenticity. Nevertheless, this study shows that consumers are more likely to believe and value a SMI who demonstrates transparency in his or her collaborations. Marketers are therefore advised to follow the legal rules governing influencer marketing, not only out of respect for consumers and to preserve their relationship with them, but also to professionalize these commercial practices.

Finally, it is essential that marketers have a thorough understanding of the potential dangers of influencer marketing and its potential impact on their brand. As a result, greater awareness and education of this business practice aimed at marketing teams would be a good start, enabling professionals to understand the challenges of influencer marketing and apply the various recommendations cited above to properly execute a campaign. This will enable brands to strengthen their ability to make informed decisions, assess potential risks and implement effective strategies to preserve their image, credibility and consumer trust.

6.3 Theoretical implications

As mentioned earlier, influencer marketing has been the subject of much research in recent years, from different angles dealing for example with the credibility of SMIs, the consequences on consumer behavior, its impact on consumer loyalty, the different strategies used, ... (Erdoğmuş & Cicek, 2012; Dolan et al., 2016; Djafarova et al., 2017; Pütter, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Campbell & Farrel, 2020; Ong et al., 2022). However, the way this technique can harm brands is a topic that very few scholars have addressed. Consequently, a gap in the literature has been identified regarding the dangers of influencer marketing for brands. This study therefore contributes to filling this gap and reinforcing the currently limited knowledge about the negative consequences of influencer marketing for its users.

The originality of this study lies in its consideration and understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. Indeed, the opinions and perceptions of consumers, SMIs and marketing experts have been surveyed, so as to have complementary results that can add great value to the findings. More specifically, this study identifies the various causes that can have a negative impact on a brand's image, brand awareness, credibility and customer relations. In addition, a large part of the study examines consumer behaviour and perceptions of influencer marketing strategies adopted by brands and SMIs.

First and foremost, the results of this study complement those obtained by Lim et al. (2017) who demonstrated in their research the existence of a significant relationship between the congruence of a SMI and the product they promote with consumer's purchase intentions and attitude. Additionally, this study provides selection criteria that a brand should take into account in order to ensure good consistency, such as image, values, identity, positioning and tone of voice.

Secondly, this study supplements the proposal made by Leung et al (2022), indicating that a brand's lack of control over a SMI's content brings inconsistency to an advertisement, thus reducing its effectiveness. The results of this research work add another dimension to this risk by suggesting that the lack of control can also lead to image and reputation risks.

Thirdly, this study reconsiders the observations previously made Lou and Yuan (2018) indicating that remuneration of a SMI could raise doubts among consumers, fearing a lack of authenticity. Indeed, this current study demonstrates that the majority of consumers surveyed do not feel that their trust is altered by knowing that SMI is paid.

Furthermore, this study makes notable theoretical contributions by shedding light into other dangers of influencer marketing, suggesting risks in terms of confidentiality and data reliability, as well as various dangers in the abusive use of this promotional technique.

Finally, this study contributes to the development of forecasts for the future evolution of influencer marketing, which, according to the results, should move towards marketing that is more authentic, more transparent and closer to consumers.

6.4   Limitations and suggestions

Although this research provides relevant results and contributes to filling the gap in the literature regarding the dangers of influencer marketing for brands, it is necessary to consider certain limitations to this study.

Firstly, there are a number of limitations to the research design. A major limitation of this work lies in the nature of the study carried out. By being an exploratory study, the results obtained cannot be generalized to the population studied. As explained above, the aim of this research is to discover and explore the opinions of respondents in depth, in order to provide food for thought on the subject. As such, the results obtained are only applicable to the respondents interviewed. Consequently, it is suggested that future researches test these results through a quantitative study, in order to provide statistically significant results. Then, another limitation of this study concerns the sampling technique, which is based on a convenience sample. Respondents were found both through my personal network and by Internet or social medias searches. Although this is the least expensive and time-consuming technique, it does have its limitations, particularly in terms of the sources of selection bias that it imposes (Malhotra et al., 2017). Finally, there is a limitation concerning the diversity of the respondent interviewed. The majority of consumers were under 26, students, and only 3 of them were men. This homogeneity in the sample can be explained by the research method used for these respondents, who all come from my personal network. As for the SMIs, they were all women, considered to be micro influencers. This homogeneity is explained by the difficulty of reaching this target. Consequently, one limitation of this study to consider when taking the results into account is the lack of diversity in certain samples. As a result, it is recommended that the demographic profiles of respondents be further diversified for potential future research, in order to better understand the reactions and perceptions of different populations to the dangers of influencer marketing.

Secondly, although 10 consumers were interviewed, the other results only include the opinions of 5 marketing experts and 5 SMIs. Because of the length of an interview and the amount of information to be processed afterwards, qualitative research usually consists of only a few interviews. In the case of this work, 20 qualitative interviews are a relatively high number that was difficult to exceed, at the risk of damaging the quality of the research (Malhotra et al., 2017). Therefore, a limitation to this study is the low number of interviews conducted with SMIs and marketing experts. It would therefore be wise for future research to ensure that these respondent profiles are surveyed to a greater extent.

Thirdly, the subject of this thesis may be quite sensitive for some respondents, such as SMIs. Some of them were reluctant to relate their negative experience with brands, and specified not to disclose the name of an individual or a brand. Therefore, the results of this study for the section analysing the SMI group should be considered with this limitation in mind.

Fourthly, it is worth noting that each respondent interviewed resides in Belgium. Therefore, the results obtained cannot be applied to other geographical areas. As cultural differences, purchasing behaviour and marketing practices may differ from one country to another, it is important to take this limitation into account when reading the results.

Fifthly, given the limited resources available and the exploratory nature of the research, no particular social network was studied. It would therefore be interesting to explore the dangers of influencer marketing specific to one or more social medias. It is possible that the rules and algorithms of social medias influence the way in which influencer marketing is conducted.

Finally, although this study aims to take into account the opinions and perceptions of the various stakeholders in influencer marketing, by interviewing consumers, marketing experts and SMIs, it is worth mentioning that some of them were not included in the research. It is therefore suggested that other stakeholders, such as regulators for example, be interviewed.

7   APPENDICES

Appendix I. Examples of sponsored stories where SMIs do not indicate the commercial nature of the ad, or make it difficult to read and detect

Appendix II. Consumers' interview guide

1. Comprehension question

    1.1 Can you explain to me, in your own words, what influencer marketing is? This question is used to check and correct, if necessary, the respondent's understanding.

2. Consumer habits regarding influencers

    2.1 Do you follow many social media influencers on social medias? If so, for what purpose?
    2.2 What kind of social media influencers do you follow on social medias?
    2.3 Have you ever been surprised negatively by a sponsored post from a social media influencer?

3. Experience with influencer marketing

    3.1 Have you ever bought a product or service promoted by a social media influencer? *If yes continue to point 3.2, if no, go to directly to 3.6.*
    3.2 What made you decide to make this purchase?
    3.3 What did you like about this experience?
    3.4 What did you not like about this experience?
    3.5 Despite the negatives you experienced, do you still buy products promoted by influencers?
    3.6 Does your experience with that purchase influence the opinion you had on that particular social media influencer?
    3.7 Why have you never bought a product recommended by a social media influencer? *(only for those who answer no to 3.1)*

4. Opinion on influencer marketing

    4.1 How do you think influencer marketing can negatively impact a brand's image?
    4.2 How do you think influencer marketing can negatively impact consumer's behaviour?
    4.3 Does knowing that a social media influencer is being paid to make a sponsored post affect your trust in the products or services being promoted?

Appendix III. Marketing experts' interview guide

1. Filter question

      1.1 Have you ever used influencer marketing? If yes, continue to point 2, if no, go to point 5.

2. Experience with influencer marketing

      2.1 Is influencer marketing an important part of your marketing strategy?
      2.2 Have you ever had any concerns about working with an influencer?
      2.3 What impact have your influencer marketing campaign(s) had on your brand?
      2.4 What did you want to achieve as a result of the influencer marketing campaign?
      2.5 Have your objectives been achieved?
      2.5.1 If not, why were your objectives not achieved?
      2.6 Are you satisfied with the collaboration(s) you have been able to achieve with social media influencers?
      2.6.1 If not, why are you not satisfied?

3. Opinion on influencer marketing

      3.1 How do you think influencer marketing can negatively impact a brand's image?
      3.2 How do you think influencer marketing can negatively impact brand's awareness?
      3.3 How do you think influencer marketing can negatively impact consumer behaviour?

4. Prediction about the future of influencer marketing

      4.1 How would you predict the future of influencer marketing?
      4.2 Do you think influencer marketing is going to disappear?
      4.3 What do you think can be done to preserve this form of promotion?

Appendix IV. SMIs' interview guide

1. Personal view of influencer marketing

      1.1 What vision do you have of your profession?
      1.2 How does this translate into your relationships with your subscribers?
      1.3 How does this translate into your relationships with brands?

2. Experience with brands

      2.1 What criteria do you take into account before accepting a collaboration? Do you have any prohibitive factors?
      2.2 Have you ever turned down a collaboration with a brand? If yes, why?
      2.3 Have you ever regretted making a partnership?
      2.4 Do you already experience a difficult situation with brands? If yes, can you explain?

3. Experience with followers

      3.1 What impact do you think you have on your followers?
      3.2 Do you already experience a difficult situation with one of your followers? If yes, can you explain?

4. Self-experience

      4.1 How influencer marketing affects your well-being and mental health?
      4.2 Do you see yourself having a long career in this profession?

Appendix V. Interview transcript of respondent 4 among the marketing experts' group

Jeanne Loyen : Avez-vous déjà utilisé le marketing d'influence ?

R4 : Alors, pas pour moi directement, car je suis consultant et formateur, mais j'ai déjà mis plusieurs actions en place de ce type-là, effectivement, que ce soit pour des grands groupes ou pour des plus petites sociétés qui font appel alors à des micro-influenceurs plus facilement. Cela fait, je dirais, 4-5 ans maintenant et ça évolue très peu en volume, donc ce n'est pas la majorité de ce que je fais, loin de là, cela doit représenter moins de 10 % du chiffre d'affaires que je produis par an. Je suis indépendant donc je n'ai pas une structure avec certains collaborateurs ou collaboratrices qui feraient ça. Donc c'est vraiment moins de 10 % et cela restera moins de 10 %. Par contre, cela change un peu le type de campagnes au fil des années. On va beaucoup plus vers des combinaisons de micro-influenceurs et beaucoup moins de campagnes avec un seul influenceur ou une seule influenceuse de taille. Donc on réduit très fort la taille des influenceurs par campagne, mais on multiplie les influenceurs de petite taille et on essaye de les compléter entre eux pour essayer d'avoir une meilleure empreinte plutôt que de passer par des macro-influenceurs.

Jeanne Loyen : Vous conseillez à vos clients plutôt plusieurs micro-influenceurs ou nano-influenceurs, en fonction du budget de l'entreprise, qui se complètent en fonction de leur domaine d'expertise avec le produit ou le service promu ?

R4 : Oui ou par leur territoire ou leur secteur parfois. Tout dépend de ce qu'on essaye d'obtenir. Une des raisons pour lesquelles on fait ça, c'est pour réduire les risques et bien sûr augmenter le taux d'engagement, augmenter la portée, etc. Mais une autre raison c'est vraiment de réduire les risques parce que quand on travaille avec des micros ou des nanos, le taux de fraude est beaucoup moins élevé, l'authenticité est plus forte, etc. Donc, le risque d'être entraîné dans un bad buzz est plus faible.

Jeanne Loyen : Je suppose que le risque de bad buzz envers des influenceurs qui sont de plus petite taille est moins gros qu'un influenceur fortement exposé au public?

R4 : Oui, exactement. Donc c'est des deux côtés, c'est pour à la fois éviter le bad buzz direct mais également le bad buzz indirect. Dans les deux raisons, effectivement, c'est lié au taux de fraude qui est beaucoup plus élevé chez les influenceurs de moyenne taille et les tout gros influenceurs. On voit que le taux d'honnêteté est plus élevé chez les tous petits.

Jeanne Loyen : En parlant de fraude, vous voulez dire l'achat d'abonnés, de likes ?

R4 : Oui ça c'est assez caricatural mais ça arrive encore. On voit aussi de la « fraude », c'est-à-dire avoir des techniques « on s'abonne en masse et on se désabonne en masse » dans la foulée. Donc on s'abonne en masse pour avoir beaucoup d'abonnements en retour et une fois qu'on les a, on se désabonne. Donc ça c'est une technique. Une autre technique est de passer par des robots pour doper le taux d'engagement. En particulier, les taux de commentaires, qui pèse le plus lourd dans les algorithmes. Donc si c'est dopé, la viralisation[19] du post est plus importante aussi. Mais le problème est que, non seulement, ça n'a pas beaucoup de sens, c'est de la fraude, mais en plus, c'est contre-productif parce que la plupart du temps, ces commentaires sont un peu génériques, un peu bateau, ce n'est pas lié au contenu. Ce sont des commentaires que l'on pourrait mettre en dessous de n'importe quelle photo tels que : « Super photo », « Bravo pour votre travail », etc. Donc, c'est contre-

---

[19] Viral marketing is defined by Mills (2012) as follows: *"the strategic release or seeding of branded content into the socially networked online consumer ecosystem, followed by the potentially multiplicative spread of the content through the ecosystem as hosts (consumers) receive the content and are motivated to share the branded content with other consumers."* (Mills, 2012, p. 163).

productif parce que, non seulement, l'algorithme détecte de plus en plus les robots, mais en plus en termes d'image, c'est catastrophique car on est pas sur du commentaire pertinent, et donc il y a une perception de fraude, au-delà de la fraude qui n'est pas toujours détectée, qui vient abimer l'image de marque de l'entreprise.

Jeanne Loyen : Avez-vous déjà éprouvé des doutes à l'idée de faire appel à un influenceur ?

R4 : Oui, beaucoup parce qu'on n'avait pas toujours des outils comme on a aujourd'hui, qui nous aident un petit peu, y compris sur les historiques passés. Mais oui, il y a des influenceurs, des influenceuses qui sont connus quand même pour leurs progressions par à-coups, par exemple, pour des techniques, des achats, etc. Et moi-même, en tant que formateur, j'ai déjà eu des demandes d'aide de la part d'influenceurs qui avaient mis un pas de côté, qui avaient acheté des followers, par exemple, en disant « C'est une catastrophe. J'avais acheté des followers, mais mon taux d'engagement est en baisse et en plus maintenant, toutes les agences de com', voient que j'ai fraudé. Qu'est-ce que je peux faire ? Et too late ma chérie, il fallait réfléchir avant ».

Jeanne Loyen : Pouvez-vous m'expliquer ce que vous entendez par « progression par à-coups » ?

R4 : C'est toujours un peu suspect, donc en fait, c'est souvent la nuit que ça se passe. Vous voyez le lendemain matin, un gain subi de 500, 1 000, 2 000, 5 000 followers, avec un pourcentage, par rapport à la base followers du jour précédent qui explose. Et donc, on doit regarder si c'est lié à une publication parce que parfois, ça peut arriver, vous savez, vous faites un gros buzz et vous récoltez beaucoup de nouveaux followers. Ça peut tout à fait arriver. Mais quand il y a un décrochage entre cette progression subite par à-coups et le rythme de publication et le timing des publications, ça, ça sent très, très, très mauvais. Et si en plus, ce sont des opérations qui se répètent où on voit des décrochages comme ça dans les statistiques d'évolution du nombre de followers, là, en général, ça pue. Mais je dois quand même dire que grâce aussi à tous ces outils qui existent, moi, par exemple, j'utilise HypeAuditor, ça a mis une forte pression sur les influenceurs de ne pas le faire. Ils essaient de trouver d'autres moyens, et notamment en diversifiant les canaux. Donc ça, c'est une façon pour eux aussi de le faire, et notamment aussi en produisant plus de contenu propre et en volant moins, parce qu'il y a des influenceurs qui, au départ, n'ont pas produit grand-chose et se sont surtout appuyés sur des productions de contenus d'autres. Et simplement, le fait qu'ils relaient ces plagiats ou ces copies, ça leur a permis d'atteindre un certain nombre de followers et de là, éventuellement, à produire un peu plus de contenu, à faire des deals avec des marques, etc. Heureusement, tout ça est en train de se professionnaliser un petit peu par plusieurs voies, notamment le fait que maintenant, il y en a beaucoup qui travaillent avec des agences, qui les conseillent ou les déconseillent parfois. Ça, c'est déjà une chose. Et puis, l'autre chose, c'est, je pense, une forme d'autorégulation, parce que c'est un tout petit milieu où tout se fait assez vite. Dès que vous commencez à franchir des paliers, 1 000 non, mais 5 000, ça commence à se savoir dans le secteur. On est un tout petit pays, donc forcément 5 000, c'est déjà beaucoup, 10, 30, 50, 100, tout le reste est hyper visible. Comme il y a une forme de jalousie énorme entre influenceurs et influenceuses, le risque de se faire choper est de plus en plus grand, plus vous montez. Souvent, c'est des cas les plus désespérés qui jouent encore avec le feu. Mais sinon, je trouve qu'au fil des années, je suis un peu plus à l'aise avec les influenceurs dans la place. Mais on reste méfiant car c'est une industrie qui ne sent pas bon quand même globalement.

Jeanne Loyen : Donc vous analysez un peu l'évolution d'un influenceur avant d'entamer une collaboration avec eux ?

R4 : Avant même de les contacter, oui tout à fait. Je vais prendre un exemple. Il y a un animateur Télé radio assez connu qui dope artificiellement son compte mais de manière légale, c'est-à-dire, en surproduisant des concours. Donc il va faire tout le temps des concours et a une audience de concouristes, c'est-à-dire, des audiences qui ne sont pas intéressantes pour la marque à long-terme

mais qui permettent de faire du one-shot. Donc, parfois, on le sait mais on l'utilise pour ce que c'est, c'est-à-dire, on veut faire un one-shot, donc on va filer trois aspirateurs et un chèque d'autant et il va faire une campagne. On sait qu'on ne va pas fidéliser notre audience avec ça, mais notre but c'était, pour la sortie de l'aspirateur untel, de faire une campagne de visibilité sur un temps très très limité. Donc ce n'est pas parce qu'ils fraudent ou qu'ils ont des pratiques un peu limites que le secteur ne les emploient pas.

Jeanne Loyen : Et les one-shot c'est vraiment faire une promotion et atteindre un certain résultat rapidement ?

R4 : Donc il y a vraiment deux mouvements depuis des années. D'un côté, il y a ceux qui se sont spécialisés là-dedans, dans les opérations de com qui demandent en général un sacré budget mais sur un temps très très limité. Et puis, les plus malins selon moi, qui sont des influenceurs qui deviennent des créateurs de contenu et qui, eux réfléchissent à moyen et long-terme, ont leur propre ligne éditoriale, sont plus intègres, etc., restent dans leur thématique et éventuellement, multiplient les canaux, mais où la source de revenus n'est plus seulement d'avoir une audience mais c'est aussi de produire du contenu. Et donc ça, c'est beaucoup plus sain. A ce moment-là, les marques, sur le moyen et long-terme, peuvent travailler sur plusieurs campagnes, en fait. Donc on a en gros, une égérie ou quelqu'un qu'on va garder comme un des visages de la marque, et sur lesquels on va travailler à moyen et long-terme. Et les plus intelligents des influenceurs et influenceuses font ça, c'est-à-dire, ne vont pas être jugés du coup sur un one-shot mais vont travailler sur un an ou sur une série de campagnes avec les marques. Cela leur permet de structurer leurs revenus, pour avoir des revenus récurrents parce que sinon, vous dépendez trop des peak. Et en fait moi, je compare ça vraiment au sucre, parce que c'est une drogue, en fait. Donc si vous prenez un morceau de sucre, très vite vous avez beaucoup d'énergie. C'est pareil, vous faites un grand buzz et vous en voulez un autre, en fait, pas très longtemps après. Et progressivement, vous avez besoin de plus de sucre. Vous avez donc une forme d'obésité des abonnés, du volume d'abonnés, mais ce n'est pas pour ça que c'est qualitatif.

Jeanne Loyen : Quels impacts les campagnes de marketing d'influence ont-elles eu sur les marques, sociétés ou particuliers pour lesquels vous avez travaillé ?

R4 : Ca dépend toujours de l'objectif des campagnes. Il y a des campagnes qui sont des campagnes de visibilité, où là, ce qu'on va mesurer, c'est le nombre d'impressions[20], on va essayer de les localiser. En gros, au plus c'est vu par les cibles, au mieux c'est. Puis, il y a des campagnes qui servent plus à convertir du trafic. A ce moment-là, on va mesurer plusieurs choses comme le taux de conversion, donc le pourcentage de personnes qu'on est parvenu à faire passer de l'influenceur à la landing page, donc la page d'accueil d'action. Après, on mesure aussi, une fois que la cible est là-dessus, combien on parvient à en séduire et à faire passer à la caisse. On peut mesurer aussi le panier d'achat moyen. Parfois, on mesure aussi l'effet levier sur les ventes, c'est-à-dire, qu'on regarde à un instant T, on lance la campagne et ensuite, on voit s'il y a eu des ventes supplémentaires, qui ne sont pas nécessairement lié directement au canal sur lequel on a fait la campagne d'influence, parce qu'on sait qu'en digital, il faut 7 touchpoints différents en moyenne, pour qu'un prospect devienne un client. Souvent, l'influenceur ou l'influenceuse n'est qu'un des touchpoints parmi d'autres. Je vais prendre un exemple : Vous êtes Basic Fit, vous avez des campagnes télé, radio, du print[21], du web, des réseaux sociaux. Dans les réseaux sociaux, il y a une campagne d'influenceurs, pour laquelle il y a deux influenceurs, un en Flandre et un en Wallonie, qui font du ramdam[22]. Mais est-ce que la vente dans un mois sera due à cet influenceur flamand, ou au print, à la radio, etc ? Du coup, ça fait partie d'un ensemble de touchpoints, et on essaye de voir s'il y a un impact pour l'ensemble de la campagne. Tout ça pour dire que c'est rare d'avoir une campagne pure influence. Cela vient souvent dans un package

---

[20] Impression refers to the number of times content has been displayed (York, 2020)
[21] This term refers to all printed marketing tools such as catalogues, flyers, etc.
[22] Synonym: To make noise.

de communication digitale. On consacre en général à un package, 10 % à l'influence. Donc, c'est loin d'être la majorité des packages.

Jeanne Loyen : Avez-vous pu constater une augmentation dans les ventes, dans le nombre d'abonnés ou autres ?

R4 : Oui, oui. C'est extrêmement rentable. C'est un des types de marketing les plus rentables aujourd'hui. En règle générale, c'est quand même très très rentable, on est sur du 3 à 4 fois, c'est-à-dire, je paye 100 euros pour un influenceur, ça me ramène 300 à 400 euros de revenu, pas de bénéfice. C'est beaucoup plus élevé que la plupart des canaux. Mais alors pourquoi est-ce qu'on ne fait pas que ça ? Comme je vous l'ai dit, il faut plusieurs touchpoints pour y arriver et d'autre part, c'est d'ailleurs votre sujet, il y a des risques liés à ça. Une marque qui n'agirait que comme ça, prendrait beaucoup de risques. Les marketers et les annonceurs sont plutôt des gens très frileux et donc, ils préfèrent avoir des œufs dans plusieurs paniers qu'un seul canal et une seul tactique. Mais oui, il y a un bénéfice. Quand on est sur du mono canal, donc uniquement influence, on le voit très très fort, et en particulier dans certains secteurs. Donc, tout ce qui est lifestyle, beauté, mode, sport, FMCG[23], tout ça, c'est des secteurs dans lesquels ça convertit extrêmement bien. Il y a donc des secteurs où c'est encore plus fort que dans la moyenne. C'est toujours en B2C, quasiment jamais en B2B.

Jeanne Loyen : Et donc, vous aviez expliqué, que le résultat d'une campagne de marketing d'influence varie en fonction des objectifs de la marque, que ce soit pour gagner de la notoriété, réaliser des ventes, avoir plus d'abonnés, …

R4 : Tout à fait.

Jeanne Loyen : Les objectifs ont-ils été atteints ? Si non, pourquoi ?

R4 : Je dirai une fois sur deux. Maintenant, c'est toujours lié aux objectifs que l'on s'est fixés en amont. Parfois, et même très souvent, on sait que cela ne sera pas atteint, parce que la demande est trop fantaisiste. Vous voulez avoir 100.000 followers en 24 h avec un influenceur qui vous coûte 49 euros, ça va être compliqué. Je fais exprès de prendre des proportions peu réelles, mais parfois, ça n'a pas de sens. Les annonceurs n'ont pas toujours la notion d'amplification. Je m'explique : comme on va mettre des sous dans la production de contenu et dans le cachet de l'influenceur, on pense que c'est juste ça. Or, idéalement, on va faire 50 % du budget sur la production de contenu et le cachet, et 50 % dans l'amplification publicitaire de ça. Donc, on va prendre le post de l'influenceur, et le booster au niveau publicitaire. Et ça, c'est une variable difficile, car il y a du ciblage derrière. On ne va pas forcément faire de la publicité pour tout le monde, donc on va hyper-cibler ces campagnes-là et cela dépend très très fort de l'implication de l'influenceur. L'idée, c'est de dire « Chère plateforme publicitaire, montre-moi cette publicité à plus de followers de cet influenceur et à plus de semblables aux followers de cet influenceur. » Mais pour ça, il faut les qualifier.

Jeanne Loyen : Donc il y a un gros travail à faire avant de lancer la campagne ?

R4 : Oui, en fait la partie avec l'influenceur, c'est la partie la plus drôle, mais ce n'est pas la plus grosse partie du boulot. Je le vois de plus en plus comme un entraîneur de foot, c'est-à-dire, vous avez un but à atteindre, il y a des impératifs, donc, des piliers, des joueurs avec lesquels vous devez faire, et puis il y a quelques joueurs, les influenceurs. On sait que ce seront les influenceurs, mais on ne sait pas encore lesquels, car cela dépendra de la tactique, de la partie, du produit, etc. Et là, ce sont des pions en fait, on va dire ce qui est. Ce qui nous intéresse, ce n'est pas de savoir s'ils sont sympas ou pas sympas. Ce qui nous intéresse, c'est vraiment, est-ce qu'ils ont la bonne audience pour nous et est-ce qu'ils ont la

---

[23] Fast-Moving Consumer Goods.

bonne tonalité qui correspond et résonne avec la marque ? Et est-ce qu'ils vont nous permettre d'atteindre nos objectifs ? Est-ce qu'ils vont nous permettre d'accélérer, ce qu'on ne pourrait pas faire avec nos propres canaux ? Ce sont un peu des pions, pour être franc.

Jeanne Loyen : Êtes-vous satisfait des collaborations que vous avez pu établir avec les influenceurs ? Si non, pourquoi ?

R4 : Non, je dirais là aussi, 50 - 50. Alors, pas toujours au niveau annonceur, mais parfois avec les influenceurs même. Certains influenceurs ne sont pas très très honnêtes, certains sont en position de force et certains se croient en position de force. Comme toutes les relations humaines, cela peut parfois être compliqué. Certains se survendent, certains vous font payer un certain prix et puis ça s'arrête là, il n'y a qu'une relation monétaire et il n'y a pas de discussions possibles sur les contenus, les réels ou les timings, etc. Donc, parfois, ça a été compliqué, mais comme toujours, c'est une question d'attentes. On ne peut être déçu que si nos attentes ne sont pas rencontrées, mais, si les attentes sont bien précises et qu'on est sur du win-win avec l'annonceur, voilà. En fait, au plus, c'est clair en amont, au moins il y a de déceptions. Ça a tendance à aller dans ce sens-là, à se professionnaliser. Mais des arnaqueurs, il y en a.

Jeanne Loyen : Il y a également des contrats disant le nombre de publications à faire, de stories, etc., mis en place non ?

R4 : Tout à fait. Ce n'est pas encore des tout gros contrats, mais oui, tout ça est verbalisé, c'est souvent des fiches type, c'est-à-dire : type de contenu, format, heure de publication, objectifs, contexte, liens, call to action[24] principal, etc. Tout ça est un peu blindé, mais il y a toujours une marge de manœuvre de discussion sur la création, donc le contenu même. Moi, je suis plutôt dans l'école qui dit que si on a été sur cet influenceur-là, il faut lui faire confiance, elle connaît beaucoup mieux ses followers que la marque, il faut accepter cette part-là de créativité. Mais ce n'est pas toujours le cas, ça peut être très tendu.

Jeanne Loyen : Comment pensez-vous que le marketing d'influence peut avoir un impact négatif sur l'image d'une marque ?

R4 : Lorsqu'il n'y a pas une bonne adéquation entre la tonalité de l'influenceur et la tonalité de la marque. S'il n'y a pas une adéquation, de notre côté, sur la perception de la marque par le public et ce que la marque essaye de mettre en place. Si on n'est pas sur le bon canal pour le faire, là, ça me parait risqué essentiellement en termes d'image. Quand on parle de risque, moi, j'entends surtout un risque d'image, qui peut être très très varié. Cela peut être qu'on ne saura jamais, mais que cela ne colle pas avec l'image de la marque et ça l'abîme. Par exemple, nous on est plutôt premium et on a fait appel à un influenceur qu'on ne connaissait pas trop bien mais qui est plutôt populaire, bas de gamme, etc., ça abime la marque, mais on ne sait pas le chiffrer. Un autre risque, c'est les fraudes évidemment. Si un influenceur a fraudé ou va frauder avant ou après votre campagne. On a beau se dire « on a vérifié, il est super clean », on ne sait pas comment il ou elle va se comporter par la suite. Or, une fois que l'influenceur est associé à la marque, il reste associé à la marque pour la cible finale. Donc, on peut avoir, a posteriori, un risque, ce que les marques ne comprennent pas toujours. On ne paye pas seulement, je trouve, par rapport au passé, par rapport à l'audience, on paye aussi une attitude et on essaye de se garantir que le futur sera propre également. Que ce soit en termes de concurrence, en termes d'image, on a pas envie que l'influenceur avec lequel on bosse, tout à coup, poste avec le concurrent ou se mette à changer de secteur ou à avoir une tonalité beaucoup plus populiste ou à prendre des positions, etc. Ce qui m'a frappé, pendant le Covid-19, c'est que tous les influenceurs

---

[24] A call to action is a clickable element, such as a button, telling the reader what action to take, for example: "Buy it now", "Go to the website", etc. (HubSpot, s. d.)

auraient pu avoir un rôle à jouer et d'ailleurs Marius Gilbert[25] avait fait appel aux influenceurs etc., etc. Et en fait, très vite, il y a eu deux attitudes qui m'ont vraiment déplu chez les influenceurs, c'est 1 : « Donnez-moi de l'argent pour propager le truc ». Or, je pense qu'on était là dans des intérêts supérieurs, de santé, et je trouvais ça vraiment pas très très beau chez beaucoup d'entre eux. Et 2 : « Je ne vais jamais faire ça, parce que je ne veux pas me mettre une partie de mon public à dos. » Et donc, l'idée de plaire au plus grand nombre ou parfois de plaire uniquement à une niche, ça peut être un risque évident. Là, je l'ai pris dans l'autre sens avec le côté : les influenceurs ne veulent pas tout relayer. Mais il leur manque leur dimension sociétale, mais en même temps, s'ils la prennent, ils ont l'impression d'être beaucoup moins engageables par les marques. Ce n'est peut-être pas tout à fait faux, mais je trouve que là, on arrive clairement aux limites de l'influence et de la création de contenu. Sinon, il y a des petits risques évidemment, de confidentialité. Quand vous travaillez avec un influenceur, vous devez idéalement le câbler, c'est-à-dire, le contexte interne dans lequel cela va avoir lieu. Si cet influenceur est bon, il va poser des questions, y compris stratégiques. Il va vous demander quels sont les prix hauts pour l'instant, quel est le projet et pas seulement « ok dites-moi ce que je dois faire ». Le risque est qu'il parte avec des informations confidentielles à l'extérieur. Il y a donc ce risque de confidentialité.

Jeanne Loyen : Et vous aviez parlé de la réputation de l'influenceur qui peut également impacter la marque ?

R4 : Bien sûr. Je dirais que pour être complet, ça va dans l'autre sens aussi. Si je suis un influenceur, et que je travaille avec Fanta, et que dans deux semaines, Fanta rapatrie toutes ses canettes parce qu'il y a la salmonelle. Moi, influenceur, ça ne m'arrange pas. Donc, ma marque personnelle est aussi blessée.

Jeanne Loyen : Comment pensez-vous que le marketing d'influence peut avoir un impact négatif sur la notoriété d'une marque ?

R4 : Cela rejoint ce qu'on a déjà dit. En fait, la notoriété, cela n'a pas de sens en tant que tel, c'est-à-dire, c'est toujours une notoriété par rapport à quoi ou par rapport à qui. Et donc, la notoriété, a priori, ne peut être qu'amplifiée. Mais elle peut être amplifiée dans les mauvais cercles. Et, du coup, si elle est amplifiée dans d'autres cercles que celui des cibles, par défaut, c'est comme un vase communicant, elle sera moins visible auprès des bons cercles. Donc, je le verrais par effet de vase communiquant. Maintenant, on va être honnête, les gens ne sont pas dupes. On sait qu'il y a du business derrière, on sait que quand GuiHome[26] fait une publicité pour Orange, il a pris un cachet, et pas rien. Il y a d'ailleurs beaucoup de fantasmes sur les tarifs. Donc, ils savent que c'est une publicité et ça n'aura pas un impact sur la durée. Il faudrait vraiment un pas grave de côté, une complicité au-delà du rapport commercial entre annonceurs-influenceurs, pour que ça aille un vrai impact, que ce soit pour la notoriété de l'influenceur ou celle de la marque. On est, de plus en plus, dans une société qui a intégré les codes de l'influence marketing, et qui parvient à la décrypter. Et d'ailleurs, on doit de plus en plus l'annoncer, visibiliser qu'il s'agit d'une campagne d'influence. Et donc, le risque me semble moins élevé qu'au début où les frontières étaient beaucoup plus floues. Alors, il reste des tas de cas où on n'indique pas que c'est une publicité, mais, globalement, je pense qu'elle va de moins en moins se poser. Aussi, parce que le consommateur a une mémoire catastrophique. Si vous lui montrez quelque chose qu'il a vu il y a deux ans, il ne va pas se rendre compte qu'il l'a déjà vu. Et il pardonne très facilement, parce qu'il est passé à autre chose. On est tellement bombardé, constamment, de messages qui nous sollicitent, publicitaire ou non-publicitaire, qu'on ne fait pas nécessairement des liens forts. Et puis même, la notoriété, ça lui fait une belle jambe. Admettons que Coca-Cola ai une perte de notoriété totale. En trois mois, c'est rattrapé. Donc, il suffit de faire quelques belles campagnes, de donner des choses aux

---

[25] Epidemiological researcher at the Université Libre de Bruxelles.
[26] Belgian influencer and humorist.

gens, de les faire un peu rêver, et c'est nettoyé. Ce n'est jamais extrêmement durable. C'est quand même très très rare, les marques qui sont complètement blessées par un partenariat d'influence. Je ne saurais même pas en citer. Une marque, c'est cynique. Le jour où leur influenceur fait une déclaration raciste, la marque ne va pas de dire « Oula, on fait le gros dos ». Non, la marque va se dire « Et, il y a une opportunité de com ici, je vais pouvoir dénoncer mon contrat et avoir une belle visibilité, car j'ai bien expliqué aux médias, qu'il n'est pas question que nous nous associons à ces propos-là et que nous allons cesser notre collaboration avec cet influenceur ». Et c'est une opportunité de plus, et donc, le renfort de la notoriété sur les valeurs. Les marques parviennent à faire du judo avec tout. Donc, c'est assez impressionnant.

Jeanne Loyen : Comment pensez-vous que le marketing d'influence peut avoir un impact négatif sur le comportement du consommateur ?

R4 : Ce serait acheter des produits ou des services qu'il n'a pas besoin, c'est ça ?

Jeanne Loyen: Ca peut être ça ou bien par exemple le fait que le consommateur a tellement vu des publications à propos d'une marque qu'il en est dégoûté. C'est bien sûr exemple, le seul que j'ai sous la main. Je ne sais pas ce que vous en pensez ?

R4 : Oui, c'est un bon exemple. Il se peut aussi qu'un influenceur ou une influenceuse soit clivant, et donc que ma marque préférée fasse appel à un influenceur que je déteste, du coup, n'est plus ma marque préférée. C'est toujours difficile à chiffrer tout ça. Sur la consommation, il n'y a pas de risque en fait. C'est de la publicité, cela sert à faire acheter davantage, à fidéliser davantage, etc. Ça, c'est presque dans l'ADN même du marketing et de la publicité. Peut-être également en amenant la notion de caping, ce qui représente l'intensité publicitaire. Cela rejoint un petit peu ce que vous aviez dit. Par exemple, on fait une campagne, avec un caping de 7 sur le mois prochain, ce qui est très très fort. Cela veut dire qu'on va bombarder l'utilisateur, jusqu'à 7 fois sur le mois, c'est-à-dire qu'il va être exposé jusqu'à 7 fois sur le mois au même contenu. Je dis 7, mais en moyenne, on est plutôt sur du 1 à 2, et pas nécessairement par mois, mais par semaine. On détermine l'intensité de la frappe publicitaire. On va avoir une campagne organique donc on ne met pas d'argent dans l'amplification de ce que fait l'influenceur. Et puis on va amplifier ça avec de la publicité payante. Le caping c'est dire à quel point on amplifie ça. Vous avez été exposé de manière organique à l'influenceur un-tel, et bien, je vais vous remontrer du contenu lié à la marque autant de fois sur une période limitée. Ca, c'est parce qu'on sait qu'un message répétitif est plus efficace qu'un message unique et que vous n'allez pas forcément passer à l'action la première fois que vous verrez le message publicitaire. Le risque, c'est effectivement de dépasser la limite du supportable. Je vais prendre un exemple : moi, je suis très musique, festivals, etc. Et bien, depuis avant Noel, je suis bombardé par un festival en particulier et toujours sur le même canal et toujours en position 3 sur Instagram, donc une publication, deux publications, et puis la publicité. Et donc maintenant, c'est contre-productif, car j'envisageais d'y aller, mais le fait qu'il me bombarde, sans nouveau contenu, ça n'a pas de sens. Ce qu'on fait, pour limiter les risques, c'est qu'on modifie les visuels, ce qui nous permet, au passage, de tester les visuels et de voir les plus efficaces.

Jeanne Loyen : Vous parliez de différences entre les canaux, est-ce que ça peut être, par exemple, une publication sponsorisée sur Instagram, une sur Facebook, une story, un influenceur,… ?

R4: Exactement, c'est là que stratégiquement, c'est intéressant, parce qu'on fait ça en amont et on réfléchit à la complémentarité entre les canaux, les visuels, les influenceurs. Donc, on fait un mapping global de la campagne d'influence, c'est comme un puzzle. Il y a des variables qu'on peut bouger et d'autres qu'on ne peut pas bouger. Par exemple, l'intensité, on peut la bouger en temps réel, changer les visuels, abandonner un influenceur en cours de campagne pour survaloriser un autre influenceur. Ça, ça arrive tout le temps.

Jeanne Loyen : Comment prévoyez-vous l'avenir du marketing d'influence ?

R4 : Je pense qu'on va devoir se professionnaliser davantage. Moi, ce qui me travaille pour le futur, c'est la notion d'authenticité. Autrement dit, et ce n'est pas seulement lié au marketing d'influence, mais au marketing en général, les gens en ont ras le bol et sont devenus aveugles par rapport à un certain nombre de publicités. Et je les comprends, vraiment. Il va donc falloir trouver d'autres façons de communiquer avec eux, sans les forcer, sans les violer, comme je dis souvent, car la publicité a tendance à violer les consommateurs. Et pour ça, je crois que les meilleurs influenceurs vont sortir du lot, parce qu'ils seront devenus des créateurs de contenu, à valeur ajoutée. Donc, le simple fait d'avoir : « Achetez ça, c'est super », « Si vous achetez ça, vous avez 15 % de réduction si tu swipes up[27] avant demain et que tu utilises le code promo ». Tout ça, pour moi, c'est mort. En-tout-cas, ce n'est pas vers ça que je conseillerais d'aller, mais plutôt de donner plus confiance aux créateurs de contenu, leur donner les moyens de créer du contenu de qualité, qui apporte quelque chose à l'internaute. Je ne crois plus du tout à la marque qui va matraquer, mais à la marque qui va aider et qui va inspirer, informer aussi les cibles, mais pas qui va frapper, spammer, violer l'utilisateur. Je crois qu'il va y avoir un changement dans la tonalité des campagnes d'influence, qu'on va avoir un changement aussi vers des influenceurs plus authentiques, plus petit, plus conversationnels avec leur cible. On aura aussi un changement, imposé par TikTok, vers un format de micro-vidéos, presque divertissant, où la marque est juste en tout petit, en signature.

Jeanne Loyen : Pouvez-vous m'expliquer comment vous différenciez un créateur de contenu d'un influenceur ?

R4 : Pour moi, un créateur de contenu a une ligne éditoriale, une âme, une éthique, il y a du fond. On est pas juste la poupée qui a une affiche devant elle, et peu importe ce qu'il y a sur l'affiche, du moment que ça lui paye des vacances à Dubaï.

Jeanne Loyen : On en a discuté déjà un peu, mais pour vous, le marketing d'influence n'est pas appelé à disparaître, mais à évoluer et à se professionnaliser ?

R4 : Oui, à mon sens, le marketing d'influence ne va plus vraiment exploser dans des 50-100 % de croissance. Ce sera de la croissance encore quelques années, mais la croissance viendra aussi parce que le budget moyen par campagne sera réparti sur davantage de têtes. Et donc, il y a une économie qui est en train de se formaliser autour de l'influence marketing. On va enfin reconnaître un peu plus les créateurs de contenu pour la valeur qu'ils apportent. Il faut savoir que les marques sont un peu handicapées, elles ont du mal à produire du contenu. Et le fait de passer par des influenceurs, et plutôt même par des créateurs de contenu, ça a beaucoup de sens pour elles. Les marques ont intérêt à devenir des médias et ont besoin pour ça, de tête de gondole parce qu'on ne sait pas devenir un média si on n'incarne pas son produit ou son service. Les créateurs de contenu sont les visages, et donc, ça a du sens de travailler avec eux. Mais il faut bien faire le tri entre ceux qui sont là uniquement pour twister le game ou qui sont là de manière pérenne et qui surtout, ont un mix qui est sain, c'est-à-dire, sur 100 % de mes posts d'influenceur, j'en ai par exemple 5 à 10 % qui sont de la promotion. Le reste, c'est mon contenu. Ils sont très vite tenter de monter à 20 %, 30 %, 40 %, 50 % et ne parlons même pas des starlettes qui elles sont dès le début à 80 % et qui ne postent que ce qui paye. Sauf qu'elles abîment leur propre marque personnelle, car on se rend compte qu'il n'y a pas d'âme et que l'intérêt de suivre ces personnes-là est faible. Elles sont donc obligées de partir dans des réductions toujours plus fortes et des actions coup de poing. Donc, elles sont uniquement sur des one-shot. À un moment, elles épuisent et on passe à la starlette suivante.

---

[27] A term used on social networks that tells a user viewing a story to slide their finger up to access a website or other page.

Jeanne Loyen : Pour préserver cette forme de promotion, vous aviez dit de faire appel aux créateurs de contenu, se focaliser sur le long-terme, prendre des influenceurs authentiques, …

R4 : Oui, et plusieurs, multiplier le nombre d'influenceurs.

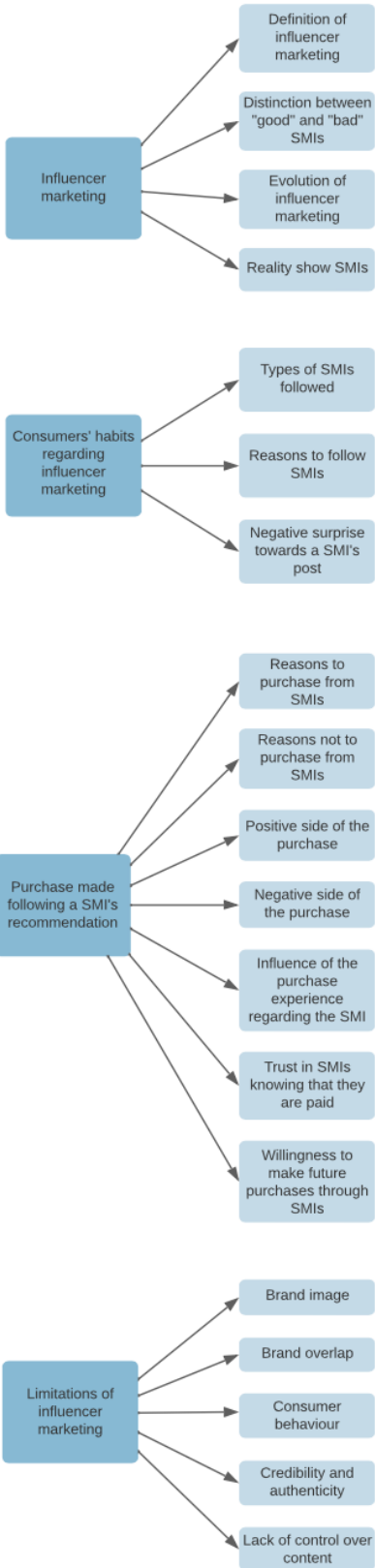*Jeanne Loyen* : Multiplier les nano ou micro influenceurs alors ?

R4 : En Belgique, on est vraiment une terre de nano ou micro influenceurs, donc en dessous de 5 000 ou de 1 000, c'est un peu plus chaud, mais ça dépend du secteur. Mais c'est souvent 5 000 en Belgique, on combine les créateurs de contenu d'au moins 5000 abonnés, c'est ce qui se fait le plus pour l'instant.

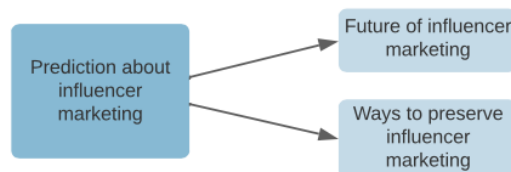*Jeanne Loyen* : Avez-vous une autre remarque ou un autre point que vous souhaiteriez aborder sur ce thème ?
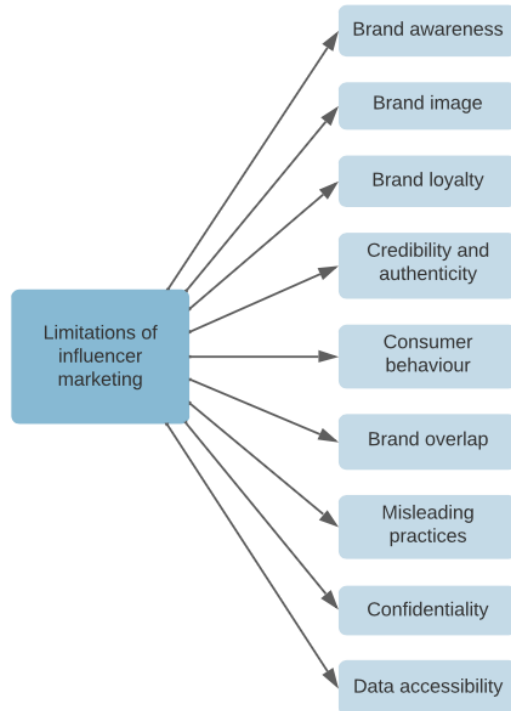
R4 : Non, je ne vois pas. Mais je trouve ça très bien que vous ayez pris cet angle-là. Comme je vous l'avais dit, je ne réponds jamais d'habitude à des étudiants parce que sinon j'ai trop de demandes. Dans les demandes que je refuse, c'est toujours la même chose, c'est bêtement : le marketing d'influence, les bénéfices pour les marques, pour tel secteur, etc. Et j'aime beaucoup que vous le preniez dans l'autre sens, ce qui est pour moi une preuve de maturité, peut-être personnelle pour vous, mais aussi pour le secteur. J'imagine très bien que cela va intéresser des gens dans le secteur, parce qu'on va sortir d'un discours naïf où tout est beau, tout est gentil, et tout est à gagner là-dedans. Non, il y a aussi des risques par rapport à ça, mais il nous revient à nous, professionnels, de nous blinder par rapport à ça. Et donc je trouve que votre sujet peut être très très utile dans le secteur.

Appendix VI. Coding tree used for the qualitative analysis

Consumers' coding tree

Influencer marketing
- Definition of influencer marketing
- Distinction between "good" and "bad" SMIs
- Evolution of influencer marketing
- Reality show SMIs

Consumers' habits regarding influencer marketing
- Types of SMIs followed
- Reasons to follow SMIs
- Negative surprise towards a SMI's post

Purchase made following a SMI's recommendation
- Reasons to purchase from SMIs
- Reasons not to purchase from SMIs
- Positive side of the purchase
- Negative side of the purchase
- Influence of the purchase experience regarding the SMI
- Trust in SMIs knowing that they are paid
- Willingness to make future purchases through SMIs

Limitations of influencer marketing
- Brand image
- Brand overlap
- Consumer behaviour
- Credibility and authenticity
- Lack of control over content

Marketing experts' coding tree
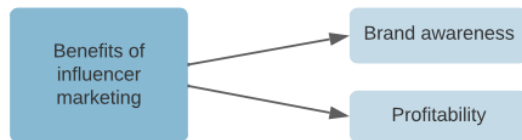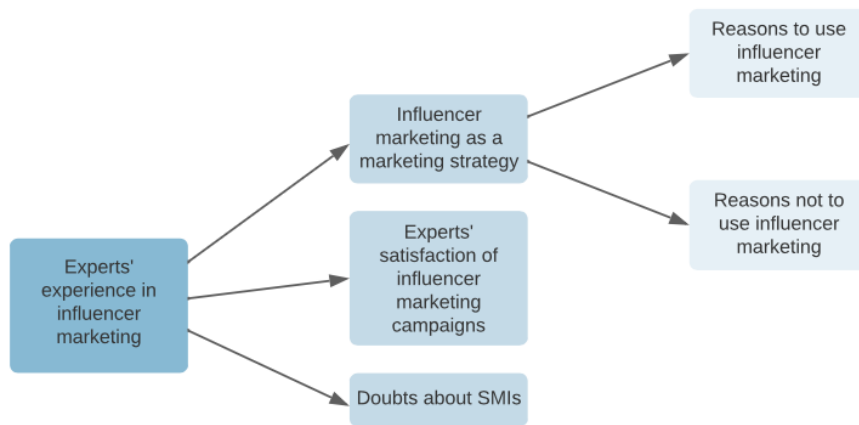
Social media influencers' coding tree

SMI's vision of influencer marketing
- Personal view of influencer marketing
- Positive aspects of influencer marketing
- Negative aspects of influencer marketing

SMI's experience with followers
- SMI's relationship with followers
- Impact of the SMI on followers
- Difficult situations encounters with followers

SMI's experience with brands
- SMI's relationship with brands
- Criteria taken into account before accepting a collaboration
- Reasons to refuse a collaboration with a brand
- Difficult situations encounters with brands

Impact of influencer marketing on SMI's well-being

Appendix VII. Examples of sponsored stories where influencers promote drug treatments or surgery

Picture 1: SMI sharing a contest about a surgery clinic.

Translation: "The clinic in Istanbul that did @julienyeko's rhinoplasty is doing a great job".

Picture 2: Story of a SMI describing the benefits of a tea, without mentioning the partnership or the commercial nature.

Translation: "When you drink this tea, it takes you back to the toilet to get rid of all the bad toxins and water retention, and it also curbs your appetite. There are special plants like turmeric, ginger and mint that will cleanse your intestines and help you lose weight."

Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3: SMI sharing a promotional code for use in a surgery clinic, without mentioning the partnership or the commercial nature.

Translation: "-30% off hyaluronic acid injections".

Picture 4: Influencer promoting food supplements aimed at restoring hormonal balance, without mentioning the commercial nature.

Translation: "Girls who need to restore their hormonal balance".

Picture 3

Picture 4

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

7 AVRIL 1995. - Arrêté royal relatif à l'information et à la publicité concernant les médicaments à usage humain., Arrêté royal n° 1995025096 (2021) (Belgique). https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/arrete/1995/04/07/1995025096/justel

About the FTC | Federal Trade Commission. (n.d.). Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://www.ftc.gov/about-ftc

Adjei, M., Noble, S., & Noble, C. (2010). The influence of C2C communications in online brand communities on customer purchase behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *38*, 634–653. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-009-0178-5

Al Kurdi, B., Alshurideh, M., Akour, I., Tariq, E., AlHamad, A., & Alzoubi, H. (2022). The effect of social media influencers' characteristics on consumer intention and attitude toward Keto products purchase intention. *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, *6*, 1135–1146. https://doi.org/10.5267/j.ijdns.2022.7.006

Alalwan, A., Rana, N., Dwivedi, Y., & Algharabat, R. (2017). Social Media in Marketing: A Review and Analysis of the Existing Literature. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.05.008

Anand, A., Dutta, S., & Mukherjee, P. (2022). Influencer marketing with fake followers. IIM Bangalore Research Paper, (580).

Ariely, D. (2007). The customers' revenge. *Harvard Business Review*, *85*, 31-43+143.

ARPP. (2022). *29.09.2022 - Observatoire de l'Influence Responsable 2021/2022: L'ARPP relève une nette amélioration de la transparence chez les créateurs de contenus*. ARPP. https://www.arpp.org/actualite/observatoire-influence-responsable-2021-2022/

Arndt, Johann (1967), "Role of Product-Related Conversations in the Diffusion of a New Product," *Journal of Marketing Research* 4 (August), 291-5.

Aswani, R., Kar, A. K., Ilavarasan, P. V., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2018). Search engine marketing is not all gold: Insights from Twitter and SEOClerks. *International Journal of Information Management*, *38*(1), 107–116. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2017.07.00

Aw, E., & Labrecque, L. (2020). Celebrity endorsement in social media contexts: Understanding the role of parasocial interactions and the need to belong. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *37*, 895–908. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-10-2019-3474

Balaban, D., & Mustățea, M. (2019). Users' Perspective on the Credibility of Social Media Influencers in Romania and Germany. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, *21*(1), 31–46. https://doi.org/10.21018/rjcpr.2019.1.269

Balaban, D., Szambolics, J., & Chirică, M. (2022). Parasocial relations and social media influencers' persuasive power. Exploring the moderating role of product involvement. *Acta Psychologica*, *230*, 103731. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103731

Ballantine, P., & Yeung, C. (2015). The effects of review valence in organic versus sponsored blog sites on perceived credibility, brand attitude, and behavioural intentions. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *33*, 508–521. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-03-2014-0044

Bandura, A., & Walters, R.H. (1963). Social learning and personality development. Holt Rinehart and Winston: New York.

Bandura, A., & National Inst of Mental Health. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bandura, A., 1994. Social cognitive theory of mass communication. In: Bryant, J., Zillmann, D. (Eds.), LEA's Communication Series. Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research, pp. 61–90.

Bang, H. J., & Lee, W.-N. (2016). Consumer Response to Ads in Social Network Sites: An Exploration into the Role of Ad Location and Path. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *37*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2015.1119765

Bardia, Y. H., Abed, A., & Majid, N. Z. (2011). Investigate the impact of celebrity endorsement on brand image. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, *58*(1), 116–132.

Belgium Instagram users by age and gender 2022. (n.d.). Statista. Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/946089/instagram-user-distribution-in-belgium-by-age-group-and-gender/

Berthon, P. R., Pitt, L. F., Plangger, K., & Shapiro, D. (2012). Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy. *Business Horizons*, *55*(3), 261–271. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2012.01.007

Bickart, B., & Schindler, R. (2001). Internet Forums as Influential Sources of Consumer Information. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *15*, 31–40. https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.1014

Boerman, S. C., Willemsen, L. M., & Van Der Aa, E. P. (2017). "This Post is Sponsored" Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure on Persuasion Knowledge and Electronic Word of Mouth in the Context of Facebook. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *38*(1), 82–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2016.12.002

Brake, S. V., & Safko, L. (2009). The social media Bible: Tactics. *Tools, And Strategies For Business Success, Publisher: John Wiley–Sons*, *45*.

Bram, B. (2019, December 12). Welcome to the age of the avatar. *Financial Times*.

Brogan, C. (2010). *Social Media 101: Tactics and Tips to Develop Your Business Online*. John Wiley & Sons.

Brown, J., Broderick, A., & Lee, N. (2007). Word of Mouth Communication Within Online Communities: Conceptualizing the Online Social Network. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *21*, 2–20. https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20082

Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. *Business Horizons*, *63*(4), 469–479. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003

Campbell, M. C., & Kirmani, A. (2000). Consumers' use of persuasion knowledge: The effects of accessibility and cognitive capacity on perceptions of an influence agent. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *27*(1), 69–83. https://doi.org/10.1086/314309

Carpenter, C. C., & Bonin, M. I. (2020). To Win Friends and Influence People: Regulation and Enforcement of Influencer Marketing after Ten Years of the Endorsement Guides. *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment & Technology Law*, *23*(2), 253–278.

Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2020). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *Journal of Business Research*, *117*, 510–519.

Celebrity Endorsements More Cost Effective Than Display Ads In Social Media—Tech Journal. (2011, March 11). https://techjournal.org/2011/03/celebrity-endorsements-more-cost-effective-than-display-ads-in-social-media/

Černikovaitė, M. (2019). The impact of Influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior in social networks. *Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Economics Engineering*, 805–812.

Chakraborty, U., & Bhat, S. (2018). The effects of credible online reviews on brand equity dimensions and its consequence on consumer behavior. *Journal of Promotion Management*, *24*(1), 57–82.

Chan, K., Leung Ng, Y., & Luk, E. K. (2013). Impact of celebrity endorsement in advertising on brand image among Chinese adolescents. *Young Consumers*, *14*(2), 167–179.

Chang, Y. (2018). Perceived message consistency: Explicating how brand messages being processed across multiple online media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *85*, 125–134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.03.038

Cheung, C., & Thadani, D. (2012). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: A literature analysis and integrative model. *Decision Support Systems*, *54*, 461–470. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.06.008

Choi, S. M., & Rifon, N. J. (2012). It is a match: The impact of congruence between celebrity image and consumer ideal self on endorsement effectiveness. *Psychology & Marketing*, *29*(9), 639–650.

Christodoulides, G., Michaelidou, N., & Argyriou, E. (2012). Cross-national differences in e-WOM influence. *European Journal of Marketing*, *46*. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211260040

Chung, S., & Cho, H. (2017). Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement: Celebrity parasocial relationships on social media. *Psychology & Marketing*, *34*, 481–495. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21001

Communication de la Commission—Orientations concernant l'interprétation et l'application de la directive 2005/29/CE du Parlement européen et du Conseil relative aux pratiques commerciales déloyales des entreprises vis-à-vis des consommateurs dans le marché intérieur (Texte présentant de l'intérêt pour l'EEE), (2021). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XC1229(05)&qid=1646650792579

Daley, B. J. (n.d.). *USING CONCEPT MAPS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH*.

Daugherty, T., Eastin, M. S., & Bright, L. (2008). Exploring Consumer Motivations for Creating User-Generated Content. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *8*(2), 16–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2008.10722139

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, *36*(5), 798–828.

Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *68*, 1–7.

Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J., & Goodman, S. (2016). Social media engagement behaviour: A uses and gratifications perspective. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *24*(3–4), 261–277.

Ducoffe, R. H. (1996). Advertising Value and Advertising on the Web. Journal of Advertising Research, 36, 21-35.

Erdogan, B. Z. (1999). Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *15*(4), 291–314. https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870379

Erdoğmuş, İ. E., & Cicek, M. (2012). The impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *58*, 1353–1360.

Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2017). Connecting with celebrities: How consumers appropriate celebrity meanings for a sense of belonging. *Journal of Advertising*, *46*(2), 297–308.

Evans, N., Phua, J., Lim, J., & Jun, H. (2017). Disclosing Instagram Influencer Advertising: The Effects of Disclosure Language on Advertising Recognition, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intent. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *17*, 00–00. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2017.1366885

Federal Trade Commission. (2022, November 10). Policy Statement Regarding the Scope of Unfair Methods of Competition Under Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act Commission File No. P221202 (Federal Trade Commission, Ed.) [Review of Policy Statement Regarding the Scope of Unfair Methods of Competition Under Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act Commission File No. P221202]. https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/ftc_gov/pdf/P221202Section5PolicyStatement.pdf

Federal Trade Commission. (n.d.). *Federal Trade Commission Act Section 5: Unfair or Deceptive Acts or Practices* (Federal Trade Commission, Ed.) [Review of *Federal Trade Commission Act Section 5: Unfair or Deceptive Acts or Practices*]. Retrieved February 12, 2023, from https://www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/supmanual/cch/200806/ftca.pdf

Ferina, N., Sri, G., & Putu, L. (2021). Does Influencer Marketing Really Improve Sustainable Brand Awareness and Sales? *Inovbiz: Jurnal Inovasi Bisnis*, *9*(1), 167–174.

Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(1), 90–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001

Freiden, J. B. (1984). Advertising spokesperson effects-An examination of endorser type and gender on 2 audiences. *Journal of advertising research*, *24*(5), 33-41.

FSMA (2023, March 1). Newsletter sur la commercialisation de monnaies virtuelles. FSMA NEWS, page1-page8. https://www.fsma.be/sites/default/files/media/files/2023-03/2023-03-20_newsletter_crypto_fr.pdf.

Fuchs, C., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2012). Customer-perceived positioning effectiveness: Conceptualization, operationalization, and implications for new product managers. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *29*(2), 229–244.

Fu, J.-R., Ju, P.-H., & Hsu, C.-W. (2015). Understanding why consumers engage in electronic word-of-mouth communication: Perspectives from theory of planned behavior and justice theory. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *14*(6), 616–630. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2015.09.003

Gallagher, K. (2018, September 24). *The Influencer Marketing Report: Research, strategy & platforms for leveraging social media influencers*. https://uk.news.yahoo.com/influencer-marketing-report-best-practices-214418008.html

Gerdeman, D. (2019, August 26). *Lipstick Tips: How Influencers Are Making Over Beauty Marketing*. HBS Working Knowledge. http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/lipstick-tips-how-influencers-are-making-over-beauty-marketing

Giffin, K. (1967). The contribution of studies of source credibility to a theory of interpersonal trust in the communication process. *Psychological Bulletin*, *68*(2), 104–120. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0024833

Global daily social media usage 2023. (2023). Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/

Goldsmith, R. E., Lafferty, B. A., & Newell, S. J. (2000). The Impact of Corporate Credibility and Celebrity Credibility on Consumer Reaction to Advertisements and Brands. *Journal of Advertising*, *29*(3), 43–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2000.10673616

Goyat, S. (2011). The basis of market segmentation: A critical review of literature. *European Journal of Business and Management*, *3*(9), 45–54.

Gruen, T., Osmonbekov, T., & Czaplewski, A. (2006). eWOM: The impact of customer-to-customer online know-how exchange on customer value and loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, *59*, 449–456. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2005.10.004

Gu, F., Kim, N., Tse, D., & Wang, D. (2010). Managing Distributors' Changing Motivations over the Course of a Joint Sales Program. *Journal of Marketing*, *74*, 32–47. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.5.32

Gunawan, D. D., & Huarng, K.-H. (2015). Viral effects of social network and media on consumers' purchase intention. *Journal of Business Research*, *68*(11), 2237–2241.

Gupta, P., & Harris, J. (2010). How E-WOM recommendations influence product consideration and quality of choice: A motivation to process information perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, *63*, 1041–1049. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.01.015

Gustafsson, A., Johnson, M., & Roos, I. (2005). The Effects of Customer Satisfaction, Relationship Commitment Dimensions, and Triggers on Customer Retention. *Journal of Marketing - J MARKETING*, *69*, 210–218. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.2005.69.4.210

Hayes, J., & King, K. (2014). The Social Exchange of Viral Ads: Referral and Coreferral of Ads Among College Students. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *14*, 98–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2014.942473

Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *18*(1), 38–52. https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10073

Hinz, O., Skiera, B., Barrot, C., & Becker, J. U. (2011). Seeding Strategies for Viral Marketing: An Empirical Comparison. *Journal of Marketing*, *75*(6), 55–71. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.10.0088

Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction. *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*, *19*, 215–229.

Hovland, C. I., Janis, I. L., & Kelley, H. H. (1953). *Communication and persuasion.*

Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *15*(4), 635–650.

HubSpot. (n.d.). *Qu'est-ce qu'un call-to-action ? Définition, création et exemples | HubSpot*. Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://www.hubspot.fr/products/marketing/calls-to-action/what-is

Hudders, L., & De Jans, S. (2022). Gender effects in influencer marketing: An experimental study on the efficacy of endorsements by same- vs. other-gender social media influencers on Instagram. *International Journal of Advertising*, *41*(1), 128–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1997455

Hudders, L., & Lou, C. (2022). The rosy world of influencer marketing? Its bright and dark sides, and future research recommendations. *International Journal of Advertising*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2137318

Huete-Alcocer, N. (2017). A Literature Review of Word of Mouth and Electronic Word of Mouth: Implications for Consumer Behavior. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01256

Hwang, K., & Zhang, Q. (2018). Influence of parasocial relationship between digital celebrities and their followers on followers' purchase and electronic word-of-mouth intentions, and persuasion knowledge. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *87*, 155–173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.029

Influencer Advertising - Global | Statista Market Forecast. (2023). Statista. https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/advertising/influencer-advertising/worldwide?currency=EUR#ad-spending

Influencer Marketing Hub. (2022). *The State of Influencer Marketing*.

Intellifluence. (2021). 2021 influencer compensation report. https://intellifluence.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2021-Intellifluence-Influencer-Compensation-Survey-Web-1.pdf

Jarrar, Y., Awobamise, A. O., & Aderibigbe, A. A. (2020). Effectiveness of influencer marketing vs social media sponsored advertising. *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana: Revista Internacional de Filosofía Iberoamericana y Teoría Social*, *12*, 40–54.

Jalilvand, M. R., Samiei, N., & Mahdavinia, S. H. (2011). The effect of brand equity components on purchase intention: An application of Aaker's model in the automobile industry. *Int Bus Manag*, *2*, 149–158.

Jayasinghe, D. (2021). Social Media and Influencer Marketing Strategies: A conceptual Review on Contemporary Applications. *Global Scientific Journals*.

Jin, S.-A. A., & Phua, J. (2014). Following celebrities' tweets about brands: The impact of twitter-based electronic word-of-mouth on consumers' source credibility perception, buying intention, and social identification with celebrities. *Journal of Advertising*, *43*(2), 181–195.

Jun, S., & Yi, J. (2020). What makes followers loyal? The role of influencer interactivity in building influencer brand equity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *ahead-of-print*. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-02-2019-2280

Kahle, L. R., & Homer, P. M. (1985). Physical attractiveness of the celebrity endorser: A social adaptation perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *11*(4), 954–961.

Kamins, M. A. (1990). An investigation into the "match-up" hypothesis in celebrity advertising: When beauty may be only skin deep. *Journal of Advertising*, *19*(1), 4–13.

Karagür, Z., Becker, J.-M., Klein, K., & Edeling, A. (2022). How, why, and when disclosure type matters for influencer marketing. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *39*(2), 313–335. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2021.09.006

Keller, K. L. (2001). *Building Customer-Based Brand Equity: A Blueprint for Creating Strong Brands*. 01.

Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change. *Journal of conflict resolution*, *2*(1), 51-60.

Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding,'micro-celebrity'and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, *8*(2), 191–208.

Ki, C.-W. 'Chloe', & Kim, Y.-K. (2019). The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: The role of consumers' desire to mimic. *Psychology & Marketing*, *36*(10), 905–922.

Kim, A. J., & Johnson, K. K. (2016). Power of consumers using social media: Examining the influences of brand-related user-generated content on Facebook. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *58*, 98–108.

Kim, J., & Song, H. (2016). Celebrity's self-disclosure on Twitter and parasocial relationships: A mediating role of social presence. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *62*, 570–577. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.083

Kim, H. (2021). Keeping up with influencers: Exploring the impact of social presence and parasocial interactions on Instagram. *International Journal of Advertising*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02650487.2021.1886477

Kohli, C., Suri, R., & Kapoor, A. (2015). Will social media kill branding? *Business Horizons*, *58*(1), 35–44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.08.004

Kurdi, B. A., Alshurideh, M., Akour, I., Tariq, E., AlHamad, A., & Alzoubi, H. M. (2022). The effect of social media influencers' characteristics on consumer intention and attitude toward Keto products purchase intention. *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, *6*(4), 1135–1146. https://doi.org/10.5267/j.ijdns.2022.7.006

Lacoste cesse sa collaboration avec les rappeurs Moha La Squale et Roméo Elvis. (n.d.). BFM BUSINESS. Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://www.bfmtv.com/economie/lacoste-cesse-sa-collaboration-avec-les-rappeurs-moha-la-squale-et-romeo-elvis_AN-202009180232.html

Lanzing J. W. A. (1996). Everything you always wanted to know about...concept mapping.

Lee, J. E., & Watkins, B. (2016). YouTube vloggers' influence on consumer luxury brand perceptions and intentions. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(12), 5753–5760. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.171

Lee, J., Park, D.-H., & Han, I. (2008). The effect of negative online consumer reviews on product attitude: An information processing view. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *7*, 341–352. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2007.05.004

Leung, F. F., Gu, F. F., & Palmatier, R. W. (2022). Online influencer marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *50*(2), 226–251. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00829-4

Lim, X. J., Radzol, A. M., Cheah, J., & Wong, M. W. (2017). The impact of social media influencers on purchase intention and the mediation effect of customer attitude. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, *7*(2), 19–36.

Litvin, S., Goldsmith, R., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic Word-of-Mouth in Hospitality and Tourism Management. *Tourism Management*, *29*, 458–468. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011

Liu-Thompkins, Y. (2012). Seeding Viral Content: The Role of Message and Network Factors. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *52*(4), 465–478. https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-52-4-465-478

Logan, K., Bright, L. F., & Gangadharbatla, H. (2012). Facebook versus television: Advertising value perceptions among females. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *6*(3), 164–179. https://doi.org/10.1108/17505931211274651

LOI n° 2023-451 du 9 juin 2023 visant à encadrer l'influence commerciale et à lutter contre les dérives des influenceurs sur les réseaux sociaux (1)—Légifrance. (n.d.). Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000047663185

Lou, C. (2021). Social Media Influencers and Followers: Theorization of a Trans-Parasocial Relation and Explication of Its Implications for Influencer Advertising View supplementary material. *Journal of Advertising*, *51*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2021.1880345

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2018). Influencer Marketing: How Message Value and Credibility Affect Consumer Trust of Branded Content on Social Media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *19*, 1–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501

Lu, J., Yao, J., & Yu, C.-S. (2005). Personal Innovativeness, Social Influences and Adoption of Wireless Internet Services via Mobile Technology. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, *14*, 245–268. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2005.07.003

Luca, M. (2015). User-generated content and social media. In *Handbook of media Economics* (Vol. 1, pp. 563–592). Elsevier.

Lueck, J. A. (2015). Friend-zone with benefits: The parasocial advertising of Kim Kardashian. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *21*(2), 91–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2012.726235

Machleit, K. A., Eroglu, S. A., & Mantel, S. P. (2000). Perceived retail crowding and shopping satisfaction: What modifies this relationship? *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *9*(1), 29–42.

Malhotra N., Nunan D., Birks D. (2017), Marketing Research: An Applied Approach, 5th Edition, Pearson Education.

Marwick, A. E. (2015). Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy. *Public Culture*, *27*(1 (75)), 137–160. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2798379

Mayrhofer, M., Matthes, J., Einwiller, S., & Naderer, B. (2020). User generated content presenting brands on social media increases young adults' purchase intention. *International Journal of Advertising*, *39*(1), 166–186.

Mayzlin, D., & Chevalier, J. (2003). The Effect of Word of Mouth on Sales: Online Book Reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *43*. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.43.3.345

McCroskey, J. C., & Teven, J. J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communications Monographs*, *66*(1), 90–103.

McGuire, William J. (1985), "Attitudes and Attitude Change", *in Handbook of Social Psychology*, vol.2, Gardner Lindzey, and Elliot Aronson, eds., New York: Random House, 233–346.

McKee, S. (2010). *Creative B2B Branding (No, Really): Building a Creative Brand in a Business World*. Goodfellow Publishers Ltd.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *27*(1), 415–444. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415

McQuarrie, E. F., Miller, J., & Phillips, B. J. (2013). The Megaphone Effect: Taste and Audience in Fashion Blogging. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *40*(1), 136–158. https://doi.org/10.1086/669042

Ministère de l'économie des finances et de la relance. (2021, 28 juillet). Paiement d'une amende de 20 000€ par l'influenceuse Nabilla BENATTIA- VERGARA, pour pratiques commerciales trompeuses sur les réseaux sociaux [Communiqué de presse]. https://www.economie.gouv.fr/files/files/directions_services/dgccrf/presse/communique/2021/cp-nabilla-benattia-vergara.pdf?v=1630408421

Mishra, D., Heide, J., & Cort, S. (1998). Information Asymmetry and Levels of Agency Relationships. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *35*, 277–295. https://doi.org/10.1177/002224379803500301

Moldovan, S., Goldenberg, J., & Chattopadhyay, A. (2011). The different roles of product originality and usefulness in generating word-of-mouth. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *28*(2), 109–119.

Moulard, J. G., Raggio, R. D., & Folse, J. A. G. (2016). Brand Authenticity: Testing the Antecedents and Outcomes of Brand Management's Passion for its Products: BRAND AUTHENTICITY. *Psychology & Marketing*, *33*(6), 421–436. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20888

Munnukka, J., Uusitalo, O., & Toivonen, H. (2016). Credibility of a peer endorser and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.

Muntinga, D., Moorman, M., & Smit, E. (2011). Introducing COBRAs: Exploring motivations for Brand-Related social media use. *Contributions To Zoology - CONTRIB ZOOL*, *30*, 13–46. https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-30-1-013-046

Nieto, J., Hernández-Maestro, R. M., & Muñoz-Gallego, P. A. (2014). Marketing decisions, customer reviews, and business performance: The use of the Toprural website by Spanish rural lodging establishments. *Tourism Management*, *45*, 115–123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.03.009

No of influencer marketing companies worldwide 2021. (2023). Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1257471/number-influencer-marketing-agencies-worldwide/

Number of worldwide social network users 2027. (2023). Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/

Nunes, J. C., Ordanini, A., & Giambastiani, G. (2021). The concept of authenticity: What it means to consumers. *Journal of Marketing*, *85*(4), 1–20.

Nurfadila, S. (2020). Impact of Influencers in Consumer Decision Process: The Fashion Industry. *INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL ON LAW, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES*, *1*(2), 1. https://doi.org/10.19184/ijl.v1i1.19146

Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, *19*(3), 39–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191

Ohanian, R. (1991). The impact of celebrity spokespersons' perceived image on consumers' intention to purchase. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *31*, 46–54.

Ong, Y. X., Sun, T., & Ito, N. (2022). Beyond influencer credibility: The power of content and parasocial relationship on processing social media influencer destination marketing campaigns. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2022: Proceedings of the ENTER 2022 ETourism Conference, January 11–14, 2022*, 110–122.

Ouahi, L., & Melghagh, M. (2020). Étude empirique sur le rôle des influenceurs digitaux dans la stratégie marketing digitale. *Revue Internationale Des Sciences de Gestion*, *3*(4).

Palmatier, R. W., Moorman, C., & Lee, J. Y. (2019). Handbook on customer centricity: Strategies for building a customer-centric organization. Edward Elgar.

Pandjaitan, D. R. H. (2018). An Analysis of Brand Awareness Influence on Purchase Intention in Bandar Lampung City's Online Transportation Service (Study on Y Generation Consumers). *KnE Social Sciences*. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i10.3418

Pellerin, C. (n.d.). *Baisse de l'engagement sur votre compte Instagram: 5 méthodes pour réagir | Pellerin Formation*. Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://www.pellerin-formation.com/baisse-engagement-instagram/

Petty, R. E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Schumann, D. (1983). Central and peripheral routes to advertising effectiveness: The moderating role of involvement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *10*(2), 135–146.

Petty, R. E., & Wegener, D. T. (1998). Matching Versus Mismatching Attitude Functions: Implications for Scrutiny of Persuasive Messages. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *24*(3), 227–240. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167298243001

Pfeffer, J., Zorbach, T., & Carley, K. (2013). Understanding online firestorms: Negative word-of-mouth dynamics in social media networks. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *20*, 117–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.797778

Pradhan, D., Duraipandian, I., and Sethi, D., (2016), "Celebrity endorsement: How celebrity–brand–user personality congruence affects brand attitude and purchase intention", Journal of Marketing Communications, vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 456-473.

Publicité et pratiques déloyales envers les consommateurs. (n.d.). SPF Economie. Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://economie.fgov.be/fr/themes/ventes/publicite/pratiques-deloyales/publicite-et-pratiques

Pütter, M. (2017). The impact of social media on consumer buying intention. *Marketing*, *3*(1), 7–13.

Rakuten Marketing. (2019). 2019 Influencer marketing global survey consumers. https://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Rakuten-2019-Influencer-Marketing-Report-Rakuten-Marketing.pdf

Reijmersdal, E., Fransen, M., Noort, G., Opree, S., Vandeberg, L., Reusch, S., Lieshout, F., & Boerman, S. (2016). Effects of Disclosing Sponsored Content in Blogs: How the Use of Resistance Strategies Mediates Effects on Persuasion. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *60*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216660141

Rogers, E. M., & Bhowmik, D. K. (1970). Homophily-Heterophily: Relational Concepts for Communication Research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *34*(4), 523–538.

Safko, L., & Brake, D. (2009). *The Social Media Bible: Tactics, Tools, and Strategies for Business Success*.

Sands, S., Ferraro, C., Demsar, V., & Chandler, G. (2022). False idols: Unpacking the opportunities and challenges of falsity in the context of virtual influencers. *Business Horizons*, *65*(6), 777–788. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2022.08.002

Santora, J. (2017, January 20). *17 Key Influencer Marketing Statistics to Fuel Your Strategy*. Influencer Marketing Hub. https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-statistics/

Shan, Y., Chen, K.-J., & Lin, J.-S. (2019). When social media influencers endorse brands: The effects of self-influencer congruence, parasocial identification, and perceived endorser motive. *International Journal of Advertising*, *39*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1678322

Shareef, M. A., Mukerji, B., Dwivedi, Y. K., Rana, N. P., & Islam, R. (2019a). Social media marketing: Comparative effect of advertisement sources. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *46*, 58–69.

Shimp, T. A. (2000). Advertising promotion. *Supplemental Aspects of Integrated*, *4*, 245–273.

Social network penetration in Belgium 2027. (2023). Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/567185/predicted-social-network-user-penetration-rate-in-belgium/

Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *53*, 101742.

Sudha, M., & Sheena, K. (2017). Impact of influencers in consumer decision process: the fashion industry. *SCMS Journal of Indian Management*, *14*(3), 14-30.

Taylor, C. (2020). The urgent need for more research on influencer marketing. *International Journal of Advertising*, *39*, 889–891. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1822104

Union européenne. (2021, December 29). Orientations concernant l'interprétation et l'application de la directive 2005/29/CE du Parlement européen et du Conseil relative aux pratiques commerciales déloyales des entreprises vis-à-vis des consommateurs dans le marché intérieur (Communication de la Commission Européenne, Ed.) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XC1229(05)&qid=1646650792579

Vasseur, V. (2022, January 22). *'C'est comme être insulté sur son lieu de travail': Harcelés, trois influenceurs témoignent*. France Inter. https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/c-est-comme-etre-insulte-sur-son-lieu-de-travail-harceles-trois-influenceurs-temoignent-1009567

Van der Lans, R., Bruggen, G., Eliashberg, J., & Wierenga, B. (2010). A Viral Branching Model for Predicting the Spread of Electronic Word of Mouth. *Marketing Science*, *29*, 348–365. https://doi.org/10.2307/40608137

Verma, S., & Yadav, N. (2021). Past, Present, and Future of Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM). *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *53*, 111–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.07.001

Virality in social media: The SPIN Framework. (n.d.). Retrieved 20 July 2023, from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/pa.1418

Vous êtes créateur de contenu ou influenceur ? Respectez ces obligations en matière de publicité. (n.d.). SPF Economie. Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://economie.fgov.be/fr/themes/ventes/publicite/vous-etes-createur-de-contenu

Wang, S. W., Kao, G. H.-Y., & Ngamsiriudom, W. (2017). Consumers' attitude of endorser credibility, brand and intention with respect to celebrity endorsement of the airline sector. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, *60*, 10–17.

We are Social, & Meltwater. (2023, January 26). *DIGITAL REPORT: L'ÉVOLUTION DU NUMÉRIQUE EN 2023*. We Are Social France. https://wearesocial.com/fr/blog/2023/01/digital-report-levolution-du-numerique-en-2023/

Wedel, M., & Kamakura, W. A. (2002). Introduction to the special issue on market segmentation. *Intern. J. of Research in Marketing*, *19*, 181–183.

Weinberg, T. (2009). *The New Community Rules: Marketing on the Social Web*.

Wellman, M. L., Stoldt, R., Tully, M., & Ekdale, B. (2020). Ethics of authenticity: Social media influencers and the production of sponsored content. *Journal of Media Ethics*, *35*(2), 68–82.

Wissman, B. (n.d.). *Micro-Influencers: The Marketing Force Of The Future?* Forbes. Retrieved 7 August 2023, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/barrettwissman/2018/03/02/micro-influencers-the-marketing-force-of-the-future/

Witrie Nuringtyas Gita A, H.B.A., 2020. Strategi Peningkatan Brand Awareness Yang Dilakukan Oleh Le Minerale Selama Masa Pandemi Covid-19. MEDIALOG J. Ilmu Komun. 3, 168–177. https://doi.org/10.35326/medialog.v3i2.754.

York, A. (2020, August 7). *Portée vs. impressions: Quelle est la différence entre ces termes ?* Insights (Français). https://sproutsocial.com/fr/insights/reach-vs-impressions-fr_fr/

Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of Social Media in Online Travel Information Search. *Tourism Management*, *31*, 179–188. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016

Zarrella, D. (2010). *The social media marketing book*. O'Reilly.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

25 billion euros: that is how much brands spent on influencer marketing in 2022 (Statista, 2023). In an era where social medias play an important role in the lives of many individuals, influencer marketing has become an unavoidable strategy for brands wishing to boost their visibility and reach their target audiences on a more personal level, through the intermediary of social media influencers. Although this marketing strategy has been established for several years now, it has become a real buzzword in the industry. However, a number of abuses have been observed in recent years. Behind the promises of profitability lie significant challenges and risks that brands need to address in a considered way. This piece of research therefore looks at the dangers of influencer marketing for brands, filling a gap in the scientific literature. By analysing the opinions and perceptions of consumers, marketing experts and social media influencers through 20 in-depth interviews, this research aims to consider the problem in its entirety.

Firstly, this study focuses on the definition of certain concepts and phenomena such as user-generated content, social media marketing, influencer marketing and its legal framework, social media influencers and many others. Secondly, the causes leading to image, reputation, notoriety, credibility and consumer relations risks for brands were explored, notably on the basis of existing scientific literature, but also through the qualitative study carried out. In total, this research was able to establish 9 dangers for brands represented by influencer marketing, linked to 13 different causes. Thirdly, another key contribution of this research is the analysis of the impact of influencer marketing on consumers, who desire more authenticity, consideration and professionalism from brands and social media influencers. Fourthly, forecasts for the future of this marketing strategy were formulated, along with suggestions for running a successful influencer campaign. According to the study, long-term partnerships, content creators and nano or micro influencers are an optimal strategy. Finally, recommendations for future research and the limitations of this work were formulated.