

# **Instagram Content Management for Fashion eCommerce Stores. Permanent and Ephemeral Content as Promotional Tools**

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<p>This thesis aimed to identify how permanent and ephemeral content should be applied on Instagram to promote fashion-oriented eCommerce stores efficiently. The research began with an overview of background information on the fashion eCommerce industry and Instagram as the focus social media channel.</p> <p>The theoretical framework covers the three main components that shape relevant content for Instagram: social media marketing with the perspective of fashion eCommerce, Instagram content marketing with the most relevant content features and techniques, and consumer behavior with the perspective of the modern e-consumer.</p> <p>The quantitative research method was selected for this study as it allows a bigger sample size and diverse statistical analyses. The data collection was conducted between 2 and 6 May 2020, and, in total, 66 respondents participated in the questionnaire. The empirical data was analyzed in SPSS, and the research findings were presented and discussed in the research result chapter.</p> <p>The research results show that when it comes to clothing brands and eCommerce on Instagram, users demonstrate more trust toward permanent content but are interested in ephemeral content as well. A list of suggested content theme applications is presented in the conclusion chapter. The study also shows that the majority of respondents have not tried the Instagram Shopping feature, which is a potential improvement target from a brand point of view. The 20 to 29 age group is the most active one in terms of brand and shopping interactions. However, other age groups also demonstrated a substantial level of interest.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b>	
Instagram Content, Permanent Content, Ephemeral Content, eCommerce, Fashion eCommerce, Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, Consumer Behavior	

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# 1 Introduction

This chapter presents key points on the purpose of the thesis and aspects that will be studied during the research. Among all others, a reader will be familiarized with the research question of the study, benefits of the planned thesis research and its key concepts.

## 1.1 Background

### Fashion eCommerce

eCommerce field is continuously growing as with the help of digitalization more and more people are seeking purchase opportunities online. The increasing availability of Internet access, use of mobile devices, and constantly improving delivery services make it possible to shop with almost no limitations. According to the Postnord eCommerce report, the number of online buyers in Europe had a 58% increase in the past four years. Currently, there are 286 million consumers in Europe shop online daily. Referring to the EU's intention to reach a single eCommerce market, numbers will continue to grow. (Postnord 2020, 8.) Even though the EU aims to achieve equal live and cost standards across all European countries, we are not there yet, and the low price remains one of the main reasons for online shopping abroad (Postnord 2020, 11).

Among all other factors, mobile devices contributed significantly to the rapid eCommerce development. It became natural to use a mobile phone or tablet to access favorite online stores and make a purchase within a few clicks. The number of European consumers who shop online via mobile devices has doubled on average and, in some cases, almost tripled compared to the year 2014 (figure 1).

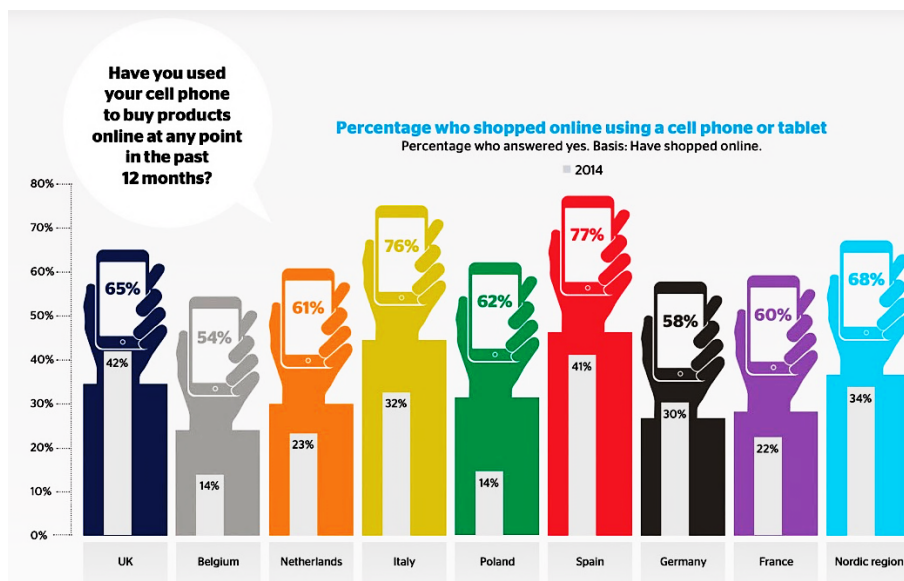


Figure 1. Percentage who shopped online using a cell phone or tablet (Postnord 2020, 15.)

When it comes to product categories, the clothing and footwear segment is an absolute leader in eCommerce across the whole Europe (figure 2). In the Nordic region alone, 59% of online buyers have purchased from the clothing and footwear category during the year 2019 (figure 3).

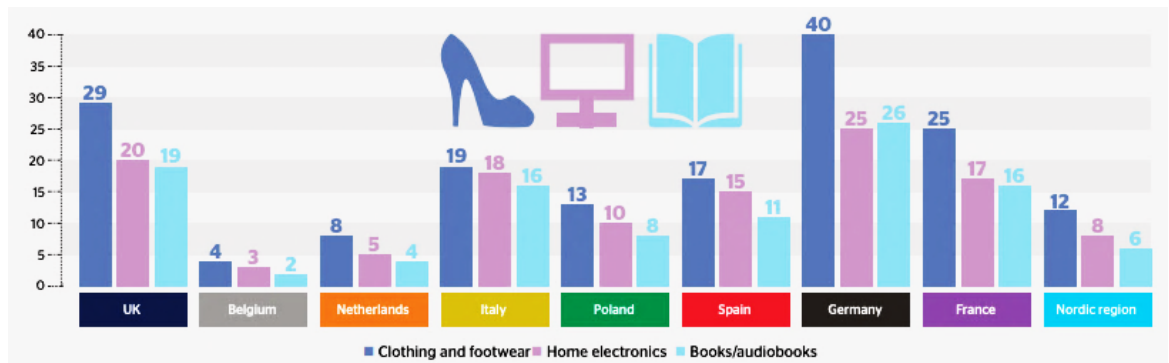


Figure 2. Top 3 European product categories among online shoppers (millions of consumers) (Postnord 2020, 10.)

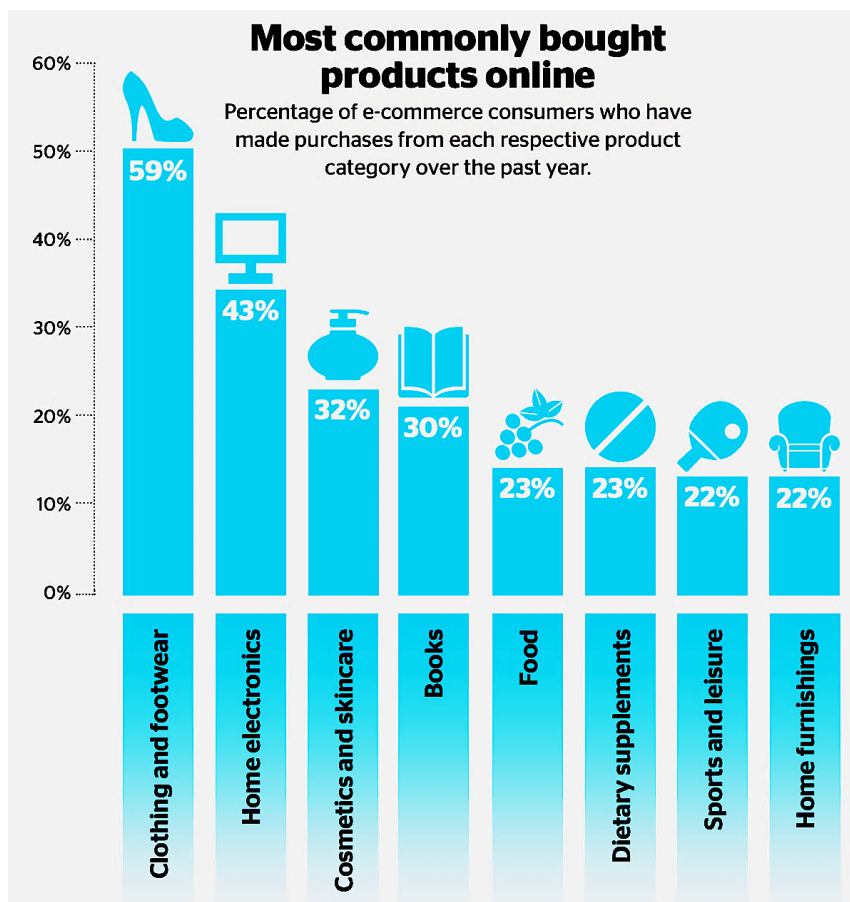


Figure 3. Most commonly bought products online in Nordics (Postnord 2020, 45.)

Fashion eCommerce is a fast-changing field. Continuously evolving online service features and ever-changing consumer demand make it challenging for fashion eCommerce retailers to compete. Some brands are shifting focus to “online first” to provide a more diverse and personalized shopping experience (Nosto 2020, 5). One of the leaders in fashion eCommerce - Zalando is already providing personalized customer interface with product suggestions that match customer’s preferences (Neerman 15 December 2017). In order to cope with competition, fashion retailers need to adjust to the online and mobile shifting trends. On average, across Europe, mobile and desktop traffic trends are moving to similar figures compared to previous years of desktop dominance. (Nosto 2020, 7.) Europe has well developed and continuously advancing internet services that enable brands to evolve and benefit their consumers. The Nordic region has the highest mobile traffic, perhaps due to exceptional mobile penetration and the Internet speed compared to other regions (appendix 2).

The fashion industry has changed drastically over the past two decades. A shifting trend from physical to online stores triggered new ways of brand-consumer communication. Social media engagement is completely overtaking already old-fashion magazine manufacturing. Within social media scope, there are new techniques to advertise a brand and win the audience.

### **Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing is a significant contributor to overall digital marketing performance; some brands focus solely on such social media platforms as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and recognize them as their primary marketing channels. Considering how fast e-businesses develop, the steady emergence of new brands and their eCommerce stores, it is no surprise why social media marketing overtaking other marketing channels like print and TV advertising.

Content marketing is a vital component of successful social media performance. It is the content that connects a brand and its audience through shared values, creative ideas, and clear message (Busche 2017, 5). Even though content management applies to all social media platforms, in this research, we will only focus on Instagram.

Why Instagram? Instagram is the 6th most popular social media channel worldwide (Statista 2020) that has 1 billion+ monthly active users (Instagram Business 2020a), of which 60% admit that they discover new products on Instagram (Instagram Business 2020b). It

was specially designed for mobile use, and it concentrates on highly visualized content. (Miles 2019, ch 1.) From various social media platforms, Instagram has become the most popular among eCommerce fashion brands. Unlike traditional advertising, Instagram advertising focuses on building a human connection with the target audience, often with the help of storytelling, celebrity and influencer collaboration. (Suja 21 August 2018.) In recent years, Instagram has developed additional features that enable a more convenient online shopping experience; these features will be covered in further chapters.

## 1.2 Research Question

The research concentrates on the Instagram permanent and ephemeral content application for fashion-oriented eCommerce stores with an existing audience in social media. The study aims to identify the main differences in these two types of content as well as when and how they should be applied to reach the desired level of interaction between a brand and consumer. The study shall also cover the affection of these two types of content on the consumer.

The research question aims to define the efficient usability of permanent and ephemeral content on Instagram for fashion eCommerce stores.

### Research question (RQ):

How permanent and ephemeral content should be applied on Instagram to promote fashion-oriented eCommerce stores efficiently?

### Investigative questions (IQ):

IQ 1. What are the differences between permanent and ephemeral content in terms of audience affection?

IQ 2. How permanent and ephemeral content influences consumer's purchasing decisions toward fashion eCommerce stores on Instagram?

Table 1 below presents the theoretical framework, research methods and results chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative Question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
------------------------	-----------------------	------------------	-------------------

<p><b>IQ 1.</b> What are the differences between permanent and ephemeral content in terms of audience affection?</p>	<p>Content marketing, consumer behavior</p>	<p>Quantitative survey</p>	<p>Quantitative data collection and analysis</p>
<p><b>IQ 2.</b> How permanent and ephemeral content influences consumer's purchasing decisions toward fashion eCommerce stores on Instagram?</p>	<p>Content marketing, consumer behavior</p>	<p>Quantitative survey</p>	<p>Quantitative data collection and analysis</p>

### 1.3 Demarcation

The research is business-to-customer (B2C) oriented and focuses on the Instagram content management for fashion eCommerce stores with existing audience network. During the research, two types of Instagram content will be studied, permanent and ephemeral content. The study will cover differences between these two types of content, their features and affection on consumer's purchasing decisions. The research will not cover specifics of copywriting for Instagram or other social media channels but not excluding referencing to copywriting as a crucial element of successful content strategy.

### 1.4 International Aspect and Current Relevance

Instagram as a marketing platform enables to promote products, services and brands worldwide. Rapidly emerging popularity and need for eCommerce stores take the online shopping experience to a different level for both local and global online selling services. Although some of the European countries tend to purchase more from local eCommerce stores, the majority prefers to shop from abroad due to price and selection differences. (Postnord 2020, 11.) Among various social media channels, Instagram is the leader for eCommerce and brand presence. (Suja 21 August 2018.) From 500 million+ daily active accounts, 90% follow various business profiles (Instagram Business 2020a.)

## 1.5 Benefits

The study aims to bring clarity to the Instagram content application and benefit the digital marketing field and those who are specializing in it. As the research is built around the fashion eCommerce sector, it should bring valuable outcomes to brands in this niche, helping them to improve their social media content strategy.

The knowledge gained during the research should improve one's professional skills and strengthen understanding of Instagram content marketing and social media content management.

## 1.6 Key Concepts

The thesis research will involve various concepts of digital marketing. The outcome of the study would be a list of recommendations and instructions on how fashion-oriented eCommerce stores should utilize permanent and ephemeral content in their content strategy to reach the desired level of audience interaction on their Instagram channel. The following key concepts and terminology will be used in the thesis research:

**eCommerce.** Also known as electronic commerce. It is a growing concept that refers to “the process of buying and selling or exchanging of products, services, and information via computer networks including the internet” (Mourya & Gupta 2014, 23).

**Permanent Content.** In social media, permanent content is a channel publication that remains available for an extended period. Cambridge dictionary (2019) defines permanent as something that “lasts for a long period or forever”; and content as a “subject or ideas contained in something written, said, created or represented”.

**Ephemeral Content.** Ephemeral content refers to social media content that is only available for a short period. It can take various forms like photos, videos, live streaming with elements and others. Ephemeral content was first introduced to the public by Snapchat and is now used by Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. (Hsu 24 August 2018.)

**Social Media Marketing (SMM).** Is “a collaborative process through which information is created, shared, altered, and destroyed.” SMM is utilized by companies to establish brand awareness and promote products or services. It involves marketing activities on various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and others. SMM is continually evolving, and compare to traditional marketing, the consumer audience and its participation stand at its core. (Evans 2008, 34.)

**Content Marketing.** It is a marketing approach that involves creation, publishing, and distribution of tailored and value-added content “to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – to drive profitable customer action” (Content Marketing Institute 2019).

**Brand Marketing Strategy.** Also known as branding, it is a strategic marketing tool that involves clearly defined brand positioning under which falls brand identity, mission, values and other defining criteria that enables to distinguished a brand from competitors. Brand marketing is directly related to a customer’s journey; it implies building meaningful customer experience connected to the brand. (Gronlund 2013, 3.)

**Consumer Behavior.** It is a study about how groups of people and individuals make their purchasing decisions in relation to products or services. The study focuses on psychological drivers and touches such aspects of consumer’s nature as culture, motives, lifestyle and many others. (Smith 28 October 2016.)

**Consumer Decision Making.** It is a process that has within it numerous steps which a consumer experiences while making a purchasing decision. The process involves selection of a specific product or service from different alternatives and final selection, also known as “buying decision-making”. (Kumra 2007, 277.)

## 2 Shaping Relevant Content for Social Media Marketing

The purpose of this chapter is to have a closer look at previously defined key concepts and reasoning behind them in relation to the thesis topic and the research question.

The figure below represents the key components of the theoretical framework.

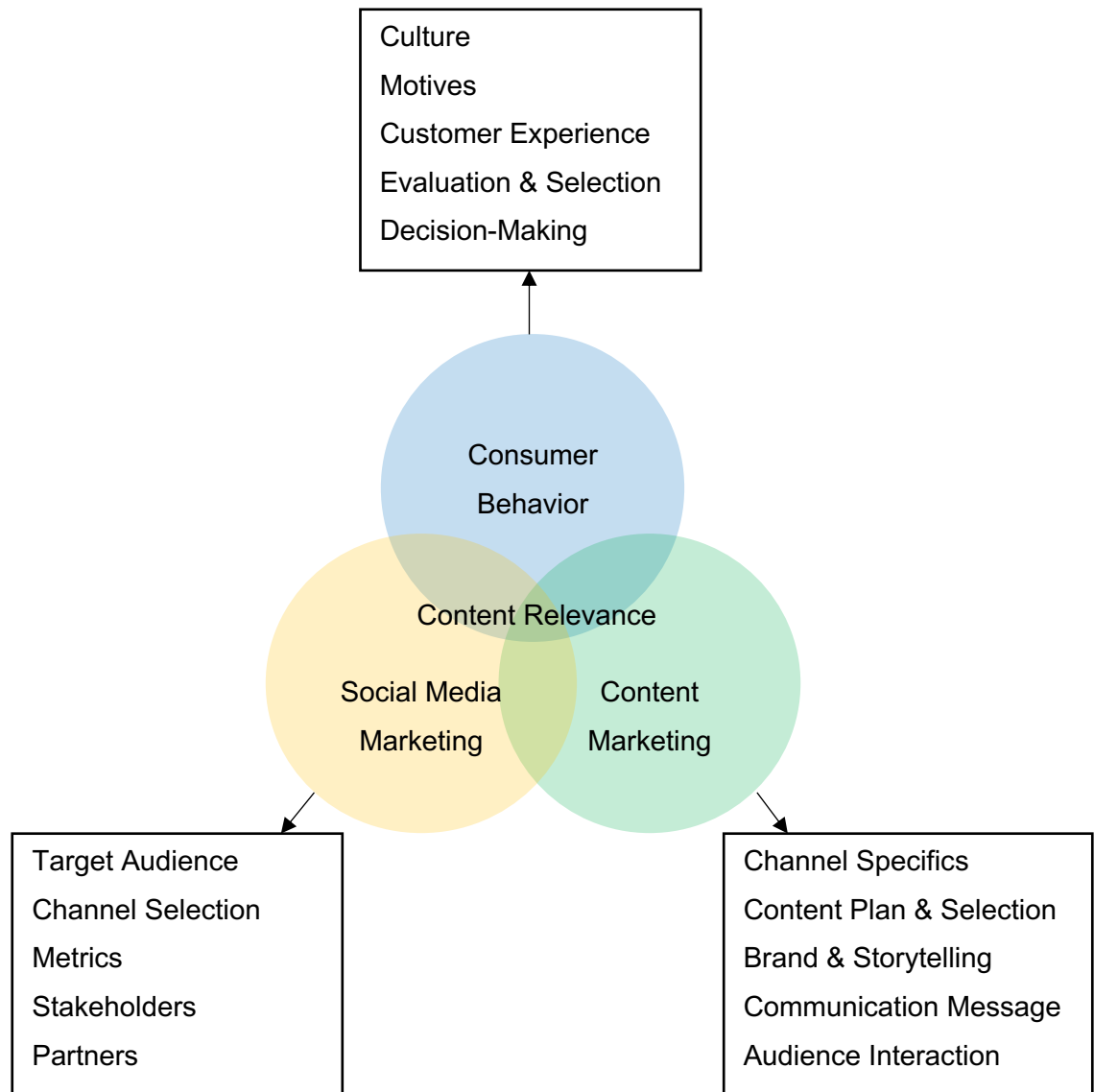


Figure 4. Key components of the theoretical framework

The three essential components selected for the theoretical framework will form the theoretical basis for this thesis research and will be studied to identify critical components and contributors of the content relevance.

By understanding the best ways to utilize permanent and ephemeral content, fashion eCommerce brands will be able to provide relevant and valuable content to their Instagram audiences; this way, enhancing brand-audience interaction and building a more reliable connection that ultimately should result in increased customer loyalty.

Content relevance lies between a successful application of social media and content strategies as well as understanding consumer behavior.

## **2.1 Social Media Marketing**

### **2.1.1 Fashion eCommerce and Social Media**

The modern fashion industry has evolved and expanded from 4 fashion seasons a year to 52 “micro-seasons” with new collections being released weekly (Whitehead 19 October 2014). The so-called “fast fashion model” is particularly popular among “mass fashion” brands as Zara - who introduced the concept, H&M, Forever21, New Yorker, and many other clothing brands. (Whitehead 19 October 2014.) As the fashion industry itself, its advertising went through a significant transformation, from the first magazines released in the 18th century to fashion blogs, eCommerce stores and their social media channels (Steele & Major 6 June 2019). Traditional advertising as big media and printing are no longer enough in this digital and personalized era; with 52 fashion seasons a year, brands need efficient, inexpensive and smart advertising solutions that social media allows.

In 2015, 96% of US fashion brands had adopted Instagram strategy (Nayak 18 April 2019); considering the rapid popularity of the platform in the following years and emerge of new fashion brands, by now (2020) all advanced fashion brands are using Instagram in their marketing strategy. Instagram, as the “visual-first” platform, provides various advertising opportunities for brands of different sizes and its extensive user network demonstrates high purchasing intentions (Facebook 2020a). According to Facebook (2020b), 70% of shoppers look for inspiration on Instagram and every month 130 million Instagram accounts click on a shopping post to learn more about the listed item. In the US alone, 36% of users admit that they consider shopping as their hobby (Facebook 2020b).

### **2.1.2 Instagram Marketing**

Customer engagement, brand awareness, website traffic, likes, and followers, there are plenty of targets and opportunities for brand activities on Instagram. The platform offers

both organic and paid postings. Although most of the brands mainly focus on paid advertising, organic content is also accountable for a significant share of success. Organic content helps to build the brand and promote its vision as well as grow the audience network (followers). It is also an effective and inexpensive way to reach the existing audience, whereas paid ads are more suited for performance goals and are better to reach potential customers and those who do not yet follow the account. (Courtenay-Smith 21 February 2019.)

Organic posts consist of “feed” and “story” postings that are not promoted. Meaning that they will not be shown to accounts that do not follow the brand directly, and even if they do follow, there are still no guarantees that posts will be visible to the audience. Nevertheless, the great share of Instagram users do visit brands’ accounts to see the content (Instagram Business 2020b). According to Business Instagram (2020b), 200+ million users open brand accounts daily. Unlike the organic approach, paid advertising allows brands to decide on content, audience location, gender, age, and other targeting criteria. If done correctly, paid advertising could be the key to a successful sales performance. In this research, we focus on the organic approach to see how brands should interact with the existing audience to increase brand loyalty.

The world of eCommerce is changing faster than ever, and social media platforms are adapting to this change. As customers become more demanding and impatient, brands are seeking smarter and faster ways to sell. Instagram for business provides various features that help businesses to reach the right people and improve the customer shopping experience. Recently released “shopping” feature allows users to make a purchase practically without leaving the platform just in 5 steps (figure 7). Instagram “product tagging” enables the audience to access all crucial information on the item without leaving the platform so they can “see it now, or save it for later” (Instagram 2020h). With barely noticeable re-direction to the product landing page, users can make a purchase practically without leaving the app. With one step further, currently available only in the US, the in-app purchase allows purchasing in two steps – select and check-out (Instagram 2020b). Facebook (2020a) claims that in one month, there are about 130 million users tap on a shoppable post to see the product information.

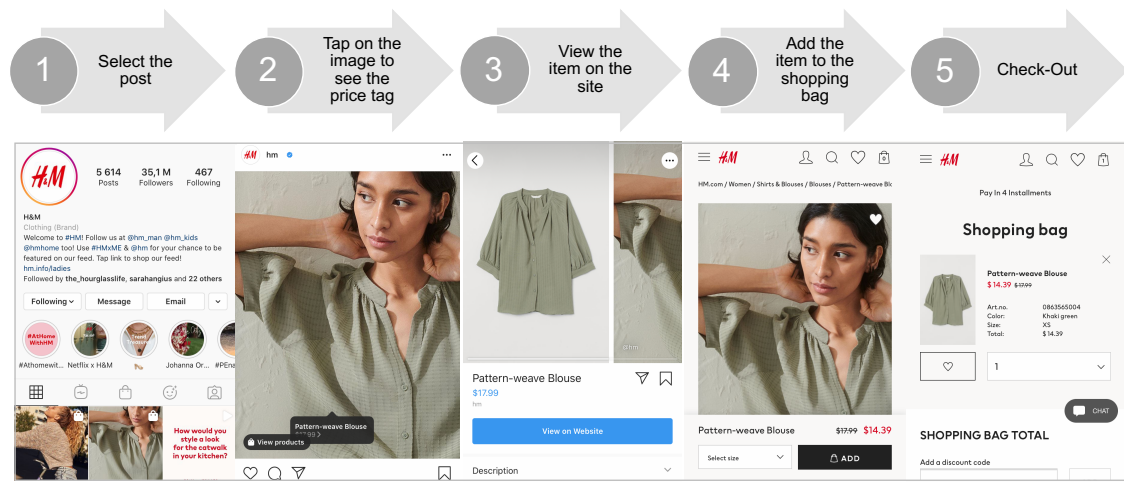


Figure 5. H&M Instagram shopping – Feed (Instagram 2020a.)

Besides having a shopping feature and precise audience targeting, Instagram for business also provides in-app access to the performance metrics – “Insights”, which means that brands can analyze how their feed and story posts perform and how the audience engages with it (Facebook 2020c).

## 2.2 Content Marketing

Content marketing has been in use for as long as marketing as a concept exists. It is although changed and evolved throughout the times, adjusting to consumer behavior, needs and current trends. In the past, content strategies were more aggressive, trying to persuade consumers to purchase in a hunting and annoying manner. This approach resulted in a negative attitude towards marketing in general and loss of consumer trust (Lieb & Szymanski, 2017, 2). As a result of digital and Internet revolution, today’s consumer is more educated than ever and aware of various marketing strategies. For that matter, the approach had to change, and current content marketing should be more customer-centric; the goal is to produce valuable content and reach out to customers who will benefit from it. Brands need to adjust their content strategies to provide relevant and valuable content through the whole customer journey to ensure a smooth customer experience. (Lieb & Szymanski, 2017, 2.)

Increasingly, B2C brands incorporate content marketing in their overall marketing strategy and give it a key role (Hubspot 2020a). The Hubspot conducted a marketing 2020 research that claims that today 70% of marketers actively invest in content marketing, and 60% consider content marketing as “very important” or “extremely important” in their marketing strategy.

With the content marketing shift and rise of influencers and bloggers, social media channels became overloaded with content; for brands, it became harder to stand out from all this noise. Even though it may seem overwhelming for the audience, today's consumers are smart and self-aware, meaning that they know what they want and can recognize the quality content. Consumers are demanding and have high expectations from brands. They wish to see a certain level of personalization and only relevant content. Brands who succeed in delivering the right conditions and content mix by understanding its audience and every step of their customer-journey, win the loyalty game (Lieb & Szymanski, 2017, 8). According to Davis (30 January 2019), 71% of customers would support a brand they trust by spending more money and 82% purchase from a brand based on its online content.

### **2.2.1 Instagram Content**

Instagram is consistently working on developing new features that keep the platform at the top of the list in terms of popularity. The content on Instagram is all about visuality. It is colorful, interactive and attractive. Presently, about 80% of marketers produce visual content for social media channels (Mawhinney 8 January 2020). At the time of writing this research, Instagram was the second most used social media platform among marketers (Hubspot 2020b).

Currently, Instagram has three ways to publish content, previously mentioned "feed" and "story" as well as so-called "IGTV". IGTV is a feature that allows users to share and watch vertical videos that are longer than 15 seconds. This research will not touch on specifics of the IGTV and will focus on the "feed" and "story" features.

Instagram "feed" posts belong to the "evergreen" content, in other words – permanent. If not removed manually, this content stays in a profile forever. "Story", on the other hand, belongs to the ephemeral content as it is only available for 24 hours. Important to mention that "story's" live span can be extended by saving them to the profile's memory under "Highlights". Nevertheless, it is still considered ephemeral as naturally this content produced and is visible only for one day. Permanent and ephemeral content have different strategic natures, although, in some cases, these two can be used interchangeably.

Permanent content is best to be applied for brand building fundamentals such as brand image and story, building a customer network, communicating important announcement,

and other that describes the brand and familiarizes the audience with it (Hsiao 7 May 2019). In fashion eCommerce, permanent content also includes shopping posts that were covered in the previous sub-chapter (figure 5). Even though Instagram is known for its visuality, permanent communication on the “feed” must be supported by a meaningful copy for a successful implementation. (Miles 2019, ch 9.) For instance, Lindex (Swedish fashion brand) is actively improving brand transparency and supports sustainable business development using primarily natural materials as a part of brand image and awareness; it is also consistently communicated on their Instagram feed as permanent content (figure 6).



Figure 6. Lindex “Grown in a field\*” Instagram feed post from 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Instagram 2020f.)

When it comes to ephemeral content, it is best suited for brand-audience interactions, authentic content without a glam, creative and educational content (Hsiao 7 May 2019). See the example in figure 7-8. Ephemeral format popularity among brands continues to grow with more interactive features created by Instagram. (Patel 2020.) Today brands can engage with their audience, ask a question and conduct surveys. According to Instagram (2020c), 68% of users demonstrate a higher interest in a product or brand after they have seen it in a “story”. On average, brands post 2.5 “stories” a week, and one-third of the most viewed ones are coming from the brand level. (Newberry 22 October 2019.) With ephemeral content, companies can build a more reliable connection with their customers by entertainingly engaging them. (Patel 2020.) Customers also appreciate brand

transparency, by sharing more “real” content such as “behind the scene” brands can build a personal connection, consequently increasing customer loyalty.

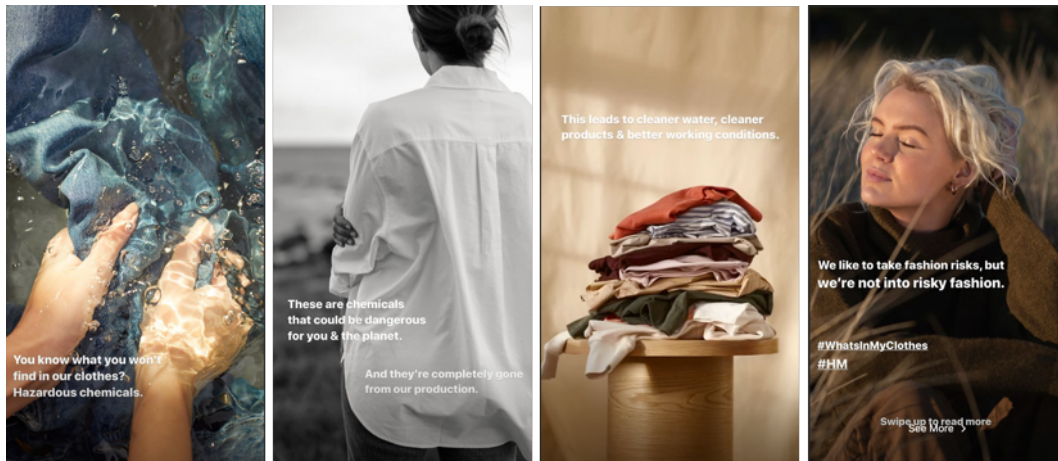


Figure 7. H&M “story” on #WhatsInMyClothes from 21 April 2020 (Instagram 2020a.)

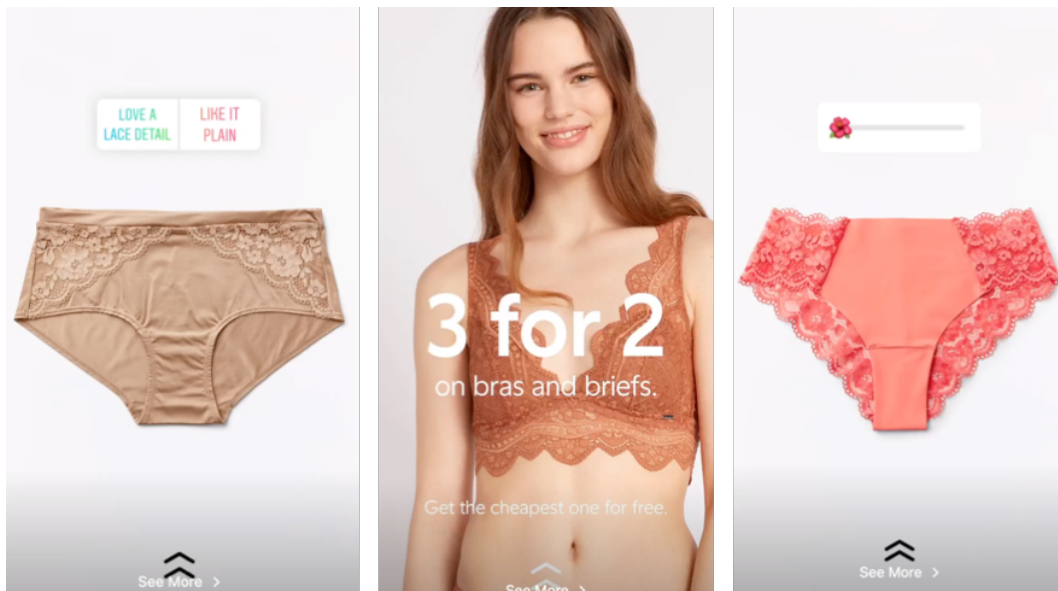


Figure 8. Lindex “story” with audience interaction from 21 April 2020 (Instagram 2020f.)

## 2.2.2 User-Generated Content (UGC)

Among various content strategies that exist today, User-Generated Content (UGC) is one of the most effective (Newberry 12 March 2019). In practice, UGC is any content produced by customers and featuring a brand’s products. UGC creates a win-win situation where customers get their share of fame being listed on the brand’s “feed” or “story”, and the brand gets the opportunity to win the audience’s trust. It allows the broader customer reach and higher conversion rate. Customers trust the reviews and opinions of

others. 92% of consumers admit that they trust recommendations if they come from a person they know, and about 70% trust the opinion of fellow online users (Newberry 12 March 2019).

Swedish outdoor and backpack brand Fjällräven took advantage of their Kånken backpack popularity and incorporated UGC to their Instagram feed (figure 9). As a result, this strategy strengthened booming popularity and item desirability worldwide.



Figure 9. Kånken's UGC post from 11 July 2019 (Instagram 2020d.)

Another excellent example of leveraging UGC is River Island. As customer engagement and UGC strategy, the brand encourages its audience to demonstrate how they wear the brand by making a post with a specific hashtag - #ImWearingRI (figure 10). This British high street clothing brand is working closely with influencers and bloggers (as most fashion brands do), adding their references to the official brand's Instagram feed (figure 11).

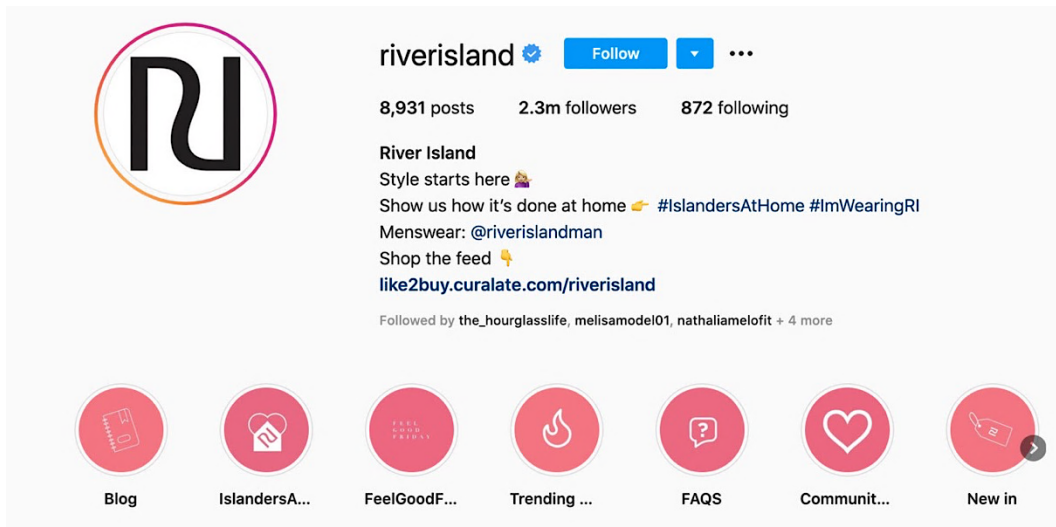


Figure 10. River Island’s Instagram bio from 22 April 2020 (Instagram 2020g.)



Figure 11. River Island’s UGC post from 21 March 2020 (Instagram 2020g.)

Today’s consumer is more attracted to the “real” content and not the fine-tuned media campaigns or magazines. About 51% of US millennials trust UGC more than the content on the brand’s website (Wainwright 1 February 2017). UGC is all about creating brand desire and loyalty with consumer’s hands.

## 2.3 Consumer Behavior

Continuous improvement of Internet services, disruptive eCommerce growth, “end-less” online service and product availability, among other rapidly changing factors, are shaping the way companies operate in today’s digital era. Customers are facing buying decisions numerous times a day, and it is the company’s marketing efforts that define whether their products will be sold or not. Today, brands around the world transform their marketing strategies to the customer-centric approach, and to successfully implement it, they need to understand their consumers more than ever. Understanding customer behavior requires a deep dive into the consumer’s world to study and investigate what are the customer’s needs, desires and triggers (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 34).

In figure 12, Armstrong & Kotler proposed their visualization of buyer behavior listing four “Ps” of marketing factors that influence consumer behavior: product, price, place, promotion, and “other” factors. Unlike with marketing factors, companies have no control over “other” factors such as economic, technological, social and cultural; nevertheless, they must be taken into account (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 163.)

The most challenging task is to understand how consumers think and why they do what they do. For that matter, the “black box”, mentioned in the buyer behavior model, is the most critical phase as this is where consumer decisions are made. Brands spend a significant amount of effort and financial resources to analyze how certain factors affect consumer decisions, what causes the shopping cart abandonment and other essential whys. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 163.)

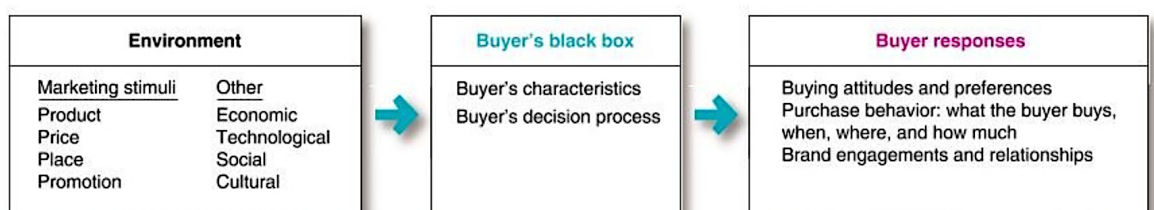


Figure 12. The model of buyer behavior (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 163.)

Although Armstrong’s & Kotler’s model outlines the main components and contributors to consumer behavior, it is missing the online consumer perspective. In the research on factors affecting online buying behavior, Dange & Kumar (2012) presented the framework that comprehensively covers additional factors of online consumer buying behavior (figure 13). The framework includes aspects on the website perspective, privacy and security; it gives a more realistic and clear picture of today’s consumer decision influencers.

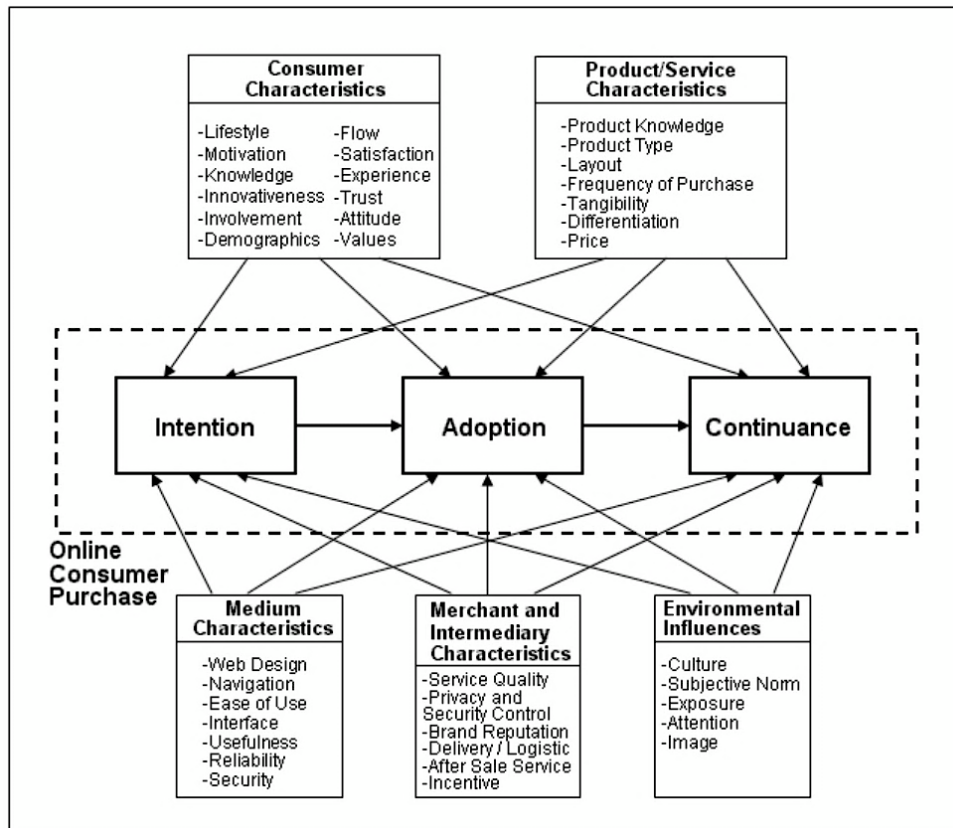


Figure 13. The framework of online consumer behavior (Dange & Kumar 2012, 6.)

As a result of the research and defined framework, Dange & Kumar (2012) suggested an alternative model of online consumer buying behavior (figure 14). The first step in the proposed model covers two types of factors that affect purchasing motives. External factors that depend on environmental conditions and cannot be influenced and internal factors that belong to human psychological processes. Then follow filtering elements that in practice related to the situation when the consumer decides if the eCommerce store is trustworthy and can be trusted in terms of privacy and security of the website or the platform. When filtering elements have been sorted and agreed on, refined buying motives revealed, and the consumer will move to the actual purchasing.

This model well-describing motives and decision influencers, but to have a complete picture of the topic, it is crucial to cover buyer decision-making process in greater depth.

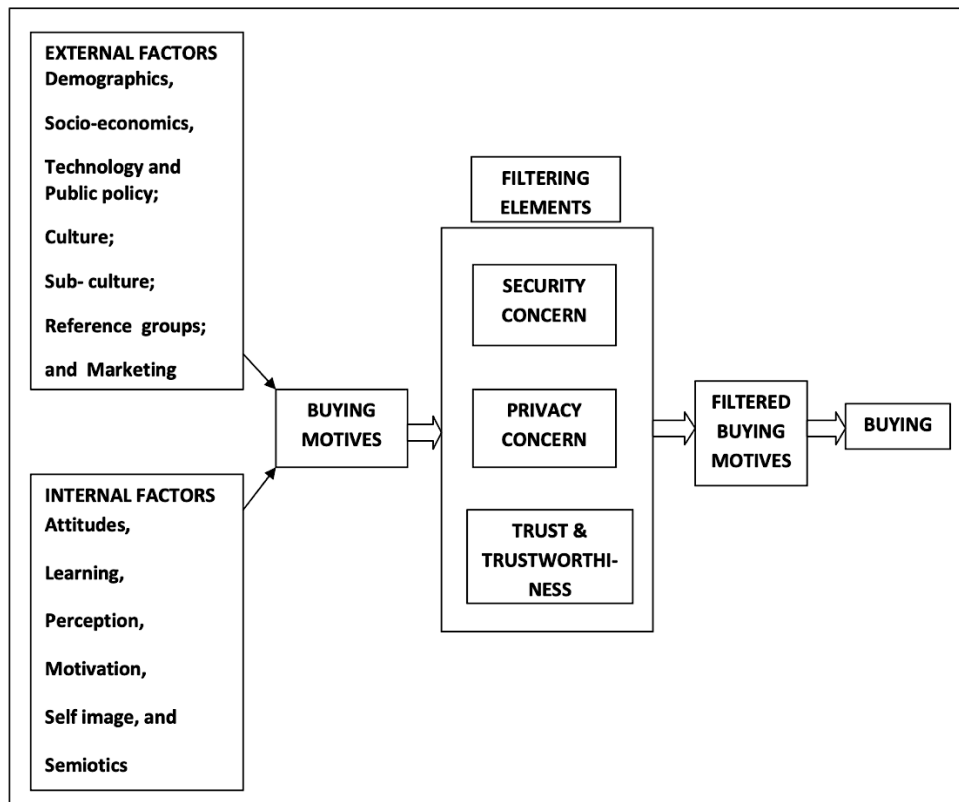


Figure 14. Online consumer buying behavior motive model, Factors (F), Filtering elements (F) and Filtered buying motive (F); (FFF Model) (Dange & Kumar 2012, 9.)

Armstrong & Kotler (2017) define five stages of buyer decision process as follow: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior (figure 15). The model below demonstrates the most probable moments that arise in the purchase decision-making process. It is essential to look at the process as a whole instead of breaking it into pieces. In addition, every buying process is different from another, and some stages might be repeated, skipped, or done in a different order. (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 177.)

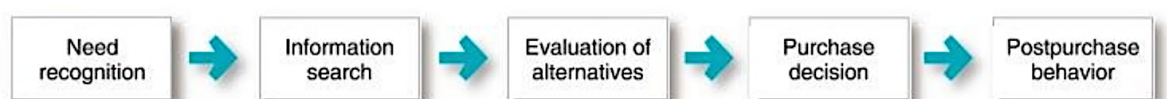


Figure 15. Buyer decision process (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 177.)

Referring to the FFF model and combining it with the previously mentioned buyer decision process, need recognition is where external and internal factors affect purchasing motives, information search and evaluation of alternatives are happening in the filtering elements stage. Post-purchase behavior was left out from the FFF model, but it is a crucial step in customer experience and must be considered in customer journey planning process. Visualization of the combined two models can be found below in figure 16.

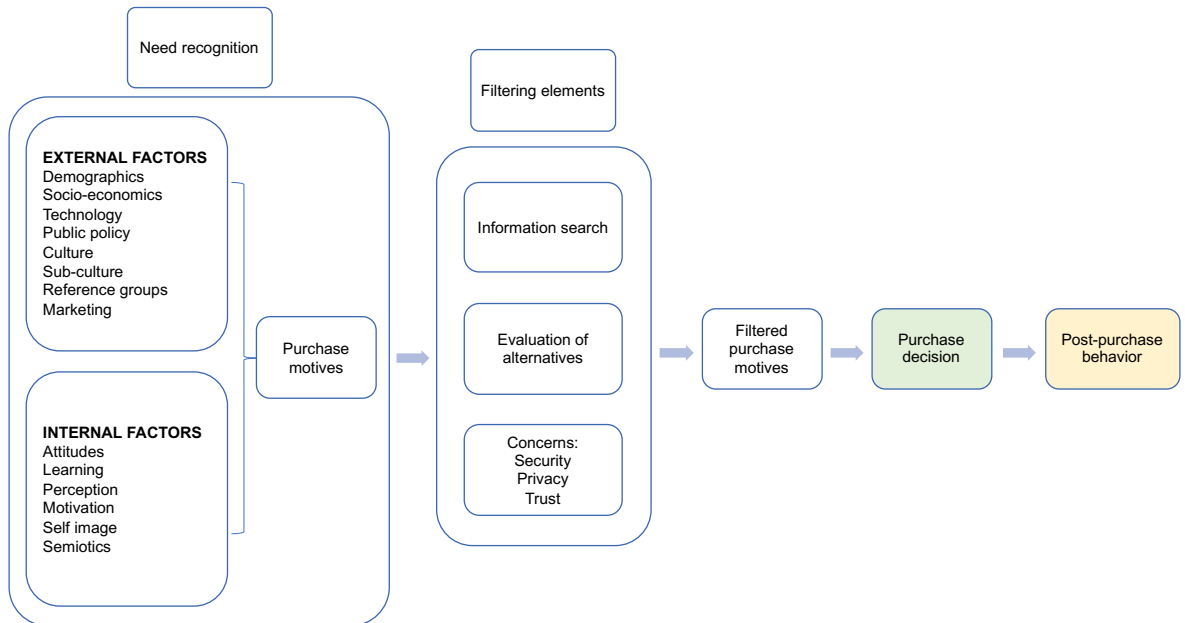


Figure 16. A combined model of online customer purchase motives and decision process (adapted from Dange & Kumar (2012, 9) and Armstrong & Kotler (2017, 177).)

Companies require to analyze all steps of consumer behavior to have an in-depth understanding and full visibility of factors that affect the consumer and his or her decision-making process. What are the consumer's needs, thinking processes and priorities? When and where is the best way to reach the consumer? By understanding all these aspects of consumer behavior and applying them to improve customer journey and overall experience, companies can win consumer trust and loyalty. (Scheinbaum 2012, 16.)

### 3 Research Methods

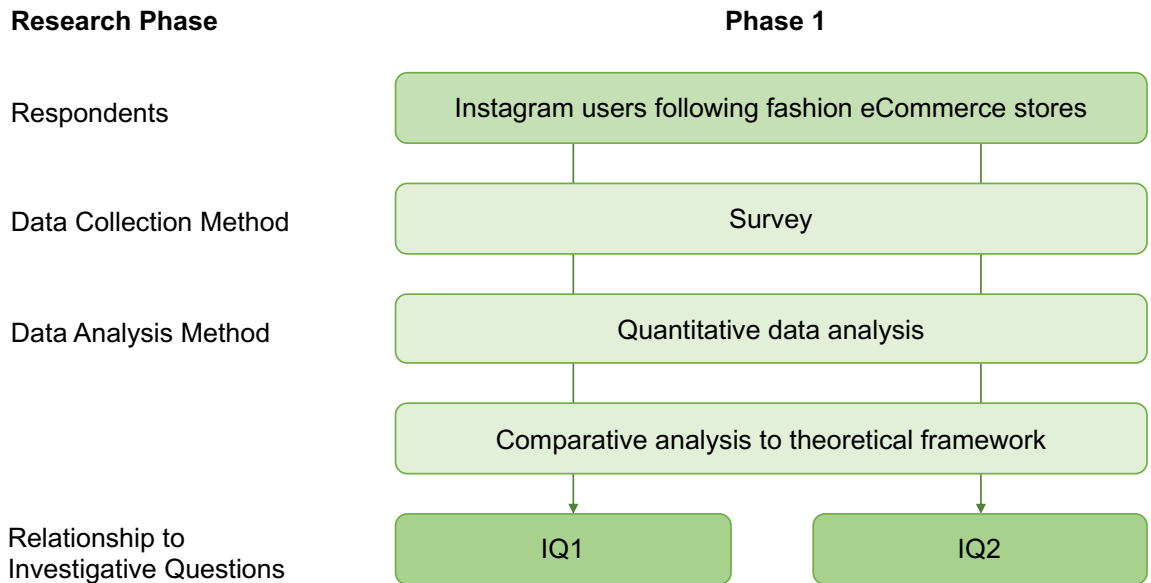


Figure 17. Research methods

For this research, a one-phase process has been selected with a quantitative survey as the data collection tool. The survey targeted Instagram users that have an interest in the fashion field and are following eCommerce stores and brands that belong to this industry. Once data has been collected and the survey closed, empirical data has been extracted from the portal and analyzed in SPSS analytical tool. The results of the statistical analysis then have been compared to the theoretical framework and checked against the investigative questions one and two (figure 17).

The quantitative research method was chosen due to its relevance in terms of empirical data collection for statistical analysis; it also allows to target big sample sizes, which was one of the criteria for data collection in this research. The survey has been created, edited and monitored with the Webropol – survey portal. The quantitative survey was distributed to potential respondents with the snowball sampling approach. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling that implies that respondents recruit others to participate in the survey; the chain of recruitments continues with new participants (Statistics How To 2019).

The ultimate goal of the questionnaire was to answer the research question by collecting a sufficient amount of information to answer investigative questions one and two.

**Research question (RQ):**

How permanent and ephemeral content should be applied on Instagram to promote fashion-oriented eCommerce stores efficiently?

**Investigative questions (IQ):**

IQ 1. What are the differences between permanent and ephemeral content in terms of audience affection?

IQ 2. How permanent and ephemeral content influences consumer’s purchasing decisions toward fashion eCommerce stores on Instagram?

**3.1 Questionnaire Design and Content**

The survey consisted of eleven questions from which two were demographic and nine subject specific questions. For convenience reasons, the words “permanent” and “ephemeral” were replaced by “feed” and “story”, as these terms were considered to be more familiar to respondents and all Instagram users.

To have a diverse data collection results, several question types were used. Single answer questions, multiple-choice questions, where respondents were asked to select multiple criteria from the list, Likert scale questions where respondents could choose the extent to which they agree or disagree with a statement and ranking questions (appendix 4).

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the content preferences of Instagram users toward fashion brands and eCommerce on Instagram. Participants were asked various questions related to permanent and ephemeral content to identify the criteria for the successful application of the two content types. Among others, the survey covered such questions as what information users would prefer to see in permanent or ephemeral postings, what is the general opinion about Instagram Shopping, and how many have tried it (appendix 4).

All the questions used in the questionnaire had a specific purpose and subject; these details are shown in the table below (table 2).

Table 2. Question number and purpose

<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>1</b>	App usage
<b>2</b>	Main content preference
<b>3</b>	Ephemeral content preference
<b>4</b>	Ephemeral content opinion

<b>5</b>	Permanent content preference
<b>6</b>	Permanent content opinion
<b>7</b>	Instagram Shopping experience
<b>8</b>	Instagram Shopping functionality
<b>9</b>	Instagram Shopping, opinion
<b>10</b>	Demographic
<b>11</b>	Demographic

### **3.2 Data Collection & Analysis**

The survey was distributed through several social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) by the author and other participants; it was published for five days via a public link (2-6 May 2020). The initial sample size target was 100, but in total, 66 have been collected.

As for the data analysis part, data was extracted from Webropol in excel format and analyzed in SPSS – software for statistical analysis. Before the data analysis, the data was cleaned and prepared for the SPSS format. In the data analysis were primarily used descriptive statistics as it was the most appropriate tests for the type of questions. Frequencies and crosstabulation tests were used to summarize the data findings and see trends and variability. Crosstabulation was applied to see the response patterns across age and gender groups. To identify the central tendency means tests were used for some of the Likert scales and ranking questions.

## 4 Research Results

This chapter will present and discuss the main research findings.

According to the data collection results, there were 244 visits to the public link, 89 participants have started to answer the questionnaire from which 66 have given their responses. The response rate is, therefore, 27%. The specifics of the survey could explain the low response rate. If a potential respondent did not have enough experience with Instagram, he or she could decide not to take part at all. It could also explain the difference between the number of participants who started and completed the survey; if, while answering the survey, a participant realized that he or she does not have enough experience with the app to complete all required questions.

### 4.1 Introduction to the Respondents

Of the 66 respondents who submitted their answers, 62.1% were female, 36.4% were male, and 1.5% preferred not to specify their gender (table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of gender (q10)

Gender	Number of Participants	Percent
Female	41	62.1 %
Male	24	36.4 %
Prefer not to specify	1	1.5 %
Total	66	100.0 %

Most of the participants (65.2%) belong to the age group of 20 to 29, and around a quarter (28.8%) belong to the 30 to 39 age group. The group of 40 years old and older has the least number of respondents (6.1%) (figure 4).

Table 4. Distribution of age (q11)

Age Group	Number of Participants	Percent
20 to 29	43	65.2 %
30 to 39	19	28.8 %
40 to 49	4	6.1 %
Total	66	100.0 %

On average, the majority (48.5%) spend 1-2 hours on Instagram daily, of which 53.5% belong to 20 to 29 age group and 31.8% of respondents say that their daily app usage

is under 1 hour (figure 18-19). The rest of the respondents (19.7%) spend longer hours in the application (figure 18).

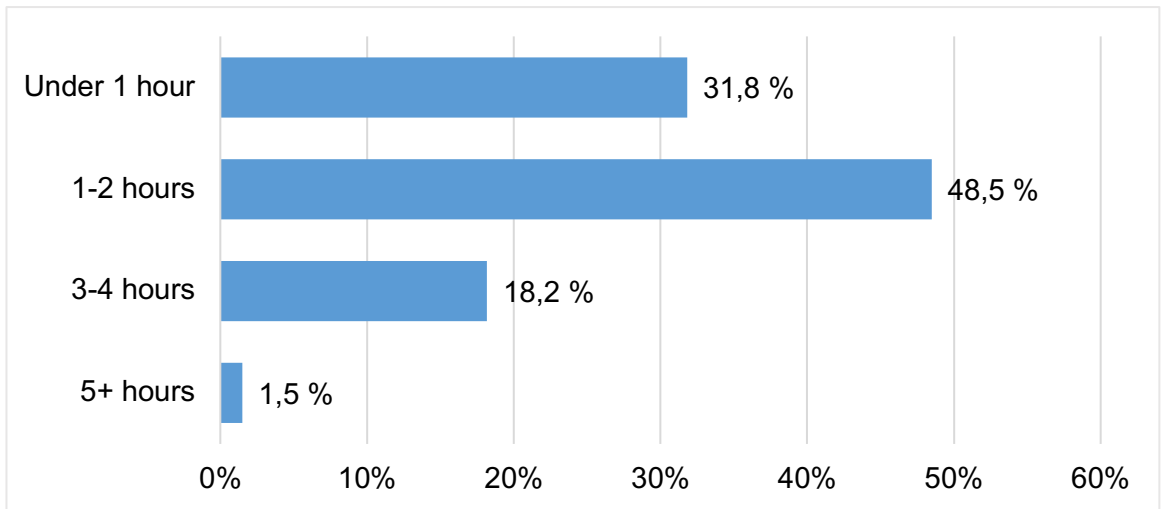


Figure 18. Daily Instagram app usage (q01)

The age groups of 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 have the highest Instagram usage daily, with most females (75.6%) and the youngest group leading (76.7%) (figure 19-20). The oldest group of participants (40 to 49) has the least daily usage, with the majority (75%) spending under 1 hour (figure 19).

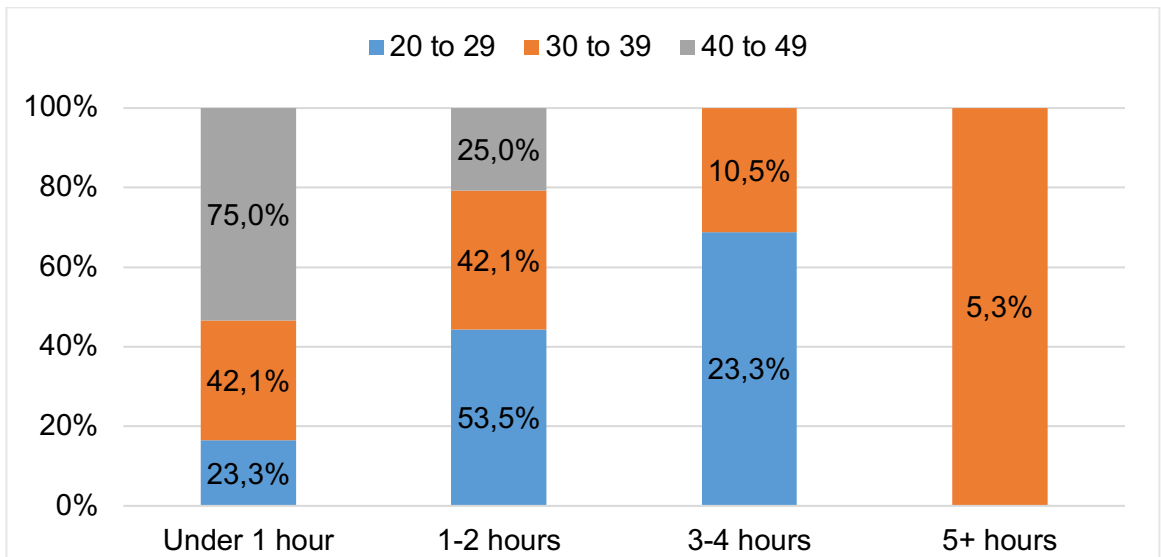


Figure 19. Daily Instagram app usage by age group (q01)

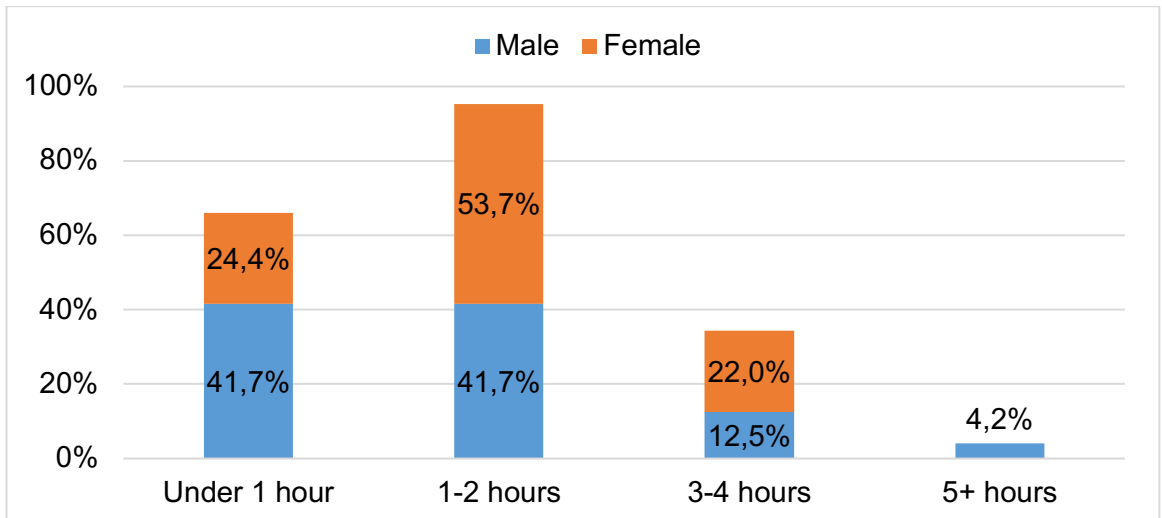


Figure 20. Daily Instagram app usage by gender (q01)

## 4.2 Permanent vs. Ephemeral Content

To identify main content preferences, participants were asked if they would rather see clothing brand items in permanent or ephemeral postings.

Unlike ephemeral postings (16.7%), permanent scored the highest (42.4%). The second highest response was neither of the two content types, as for 31.8% of respondents, it comes to the content of the posting that defines whether it should be permanent or ephemeral. From the remaining participants, 6.1% were indifferent, and 3% had other preferences (figure 21).

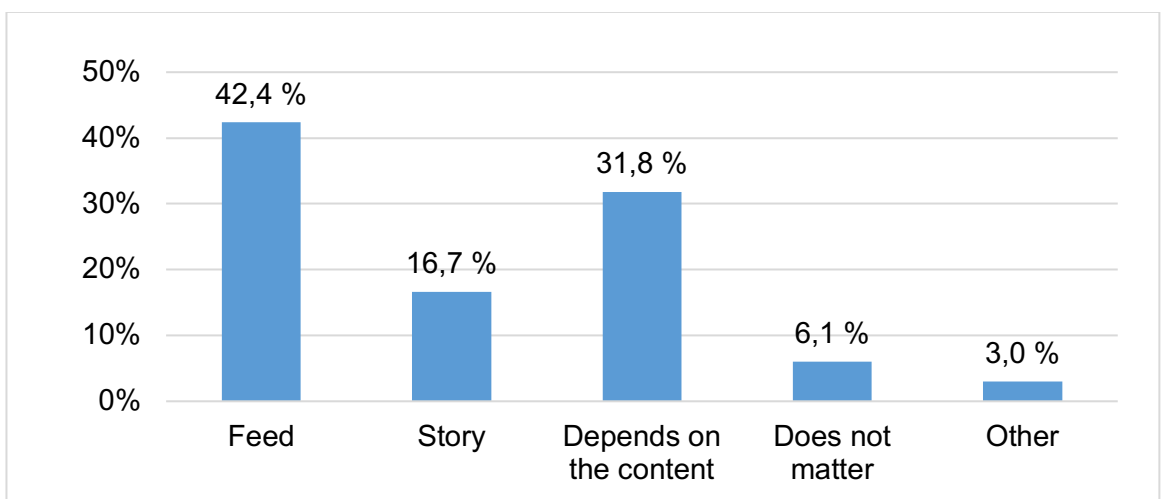


Figure 21. Main content preference (q02)

The opinion of both genders on the matter is quite similar with minor differences (figure 22).

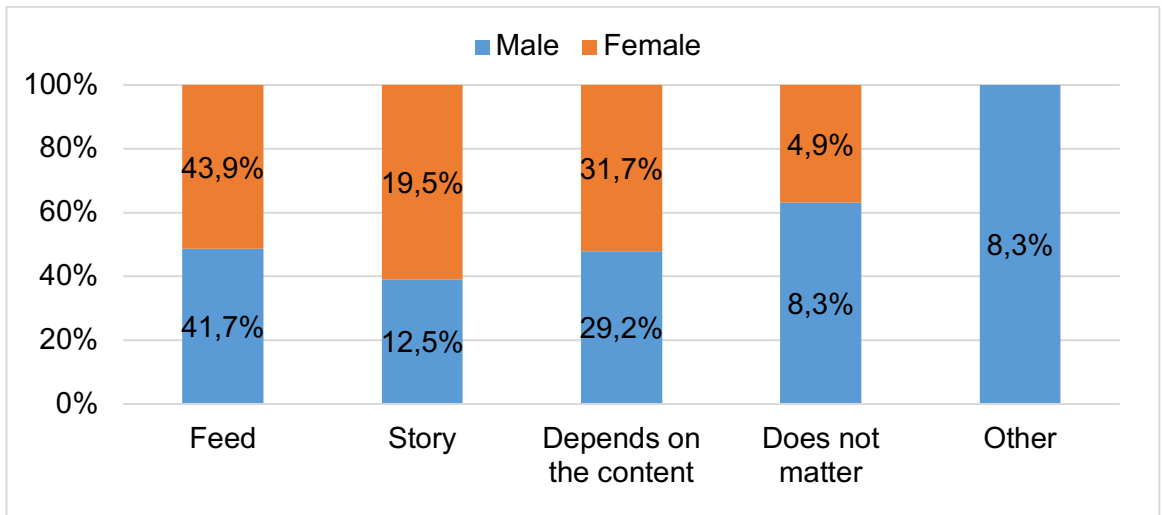


Figure 22. Main content preference by gender (q02)

A significant part of all three age groups has selected permanent posting as the preferred one for the clothing items. Age groups of 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 have more scattered response pattern, while 40 to 49 age group have only two selections with equal percent split (figure 23).

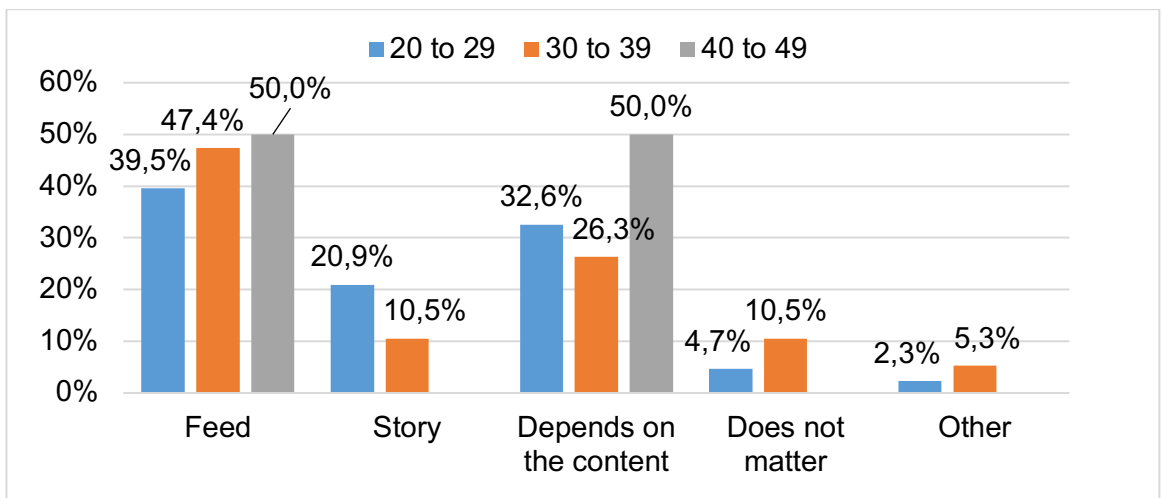


Figure 23. Main content preference by age group (q02)

### 4.3 Investigative Questions 1

Participants were asked various content-related questions that support IQ1: What are the differences between permanent and ephemeral content in terms of audience affection? The findings of these questions will be covered in this sub-chapter.

The figure below presents the participants' content type preferences for permanent and ephemeral postings. The data was collected through the multiple-choice questions. Some of the themes have a distinct difference between their preferred application, and others have a quite equal share split. "New trends & tips" scored the highest for both content categories, with ephemeral application leading (68.2%). "Brand story & vision" voted to be more suitable for permanent content (48.5%), which supports the theoretical assumption that permanent content is best to be applied for brand building content (Hsiao 7 May 2019). Other content themes have 10% or less difference in the preferred content application (figure 24).

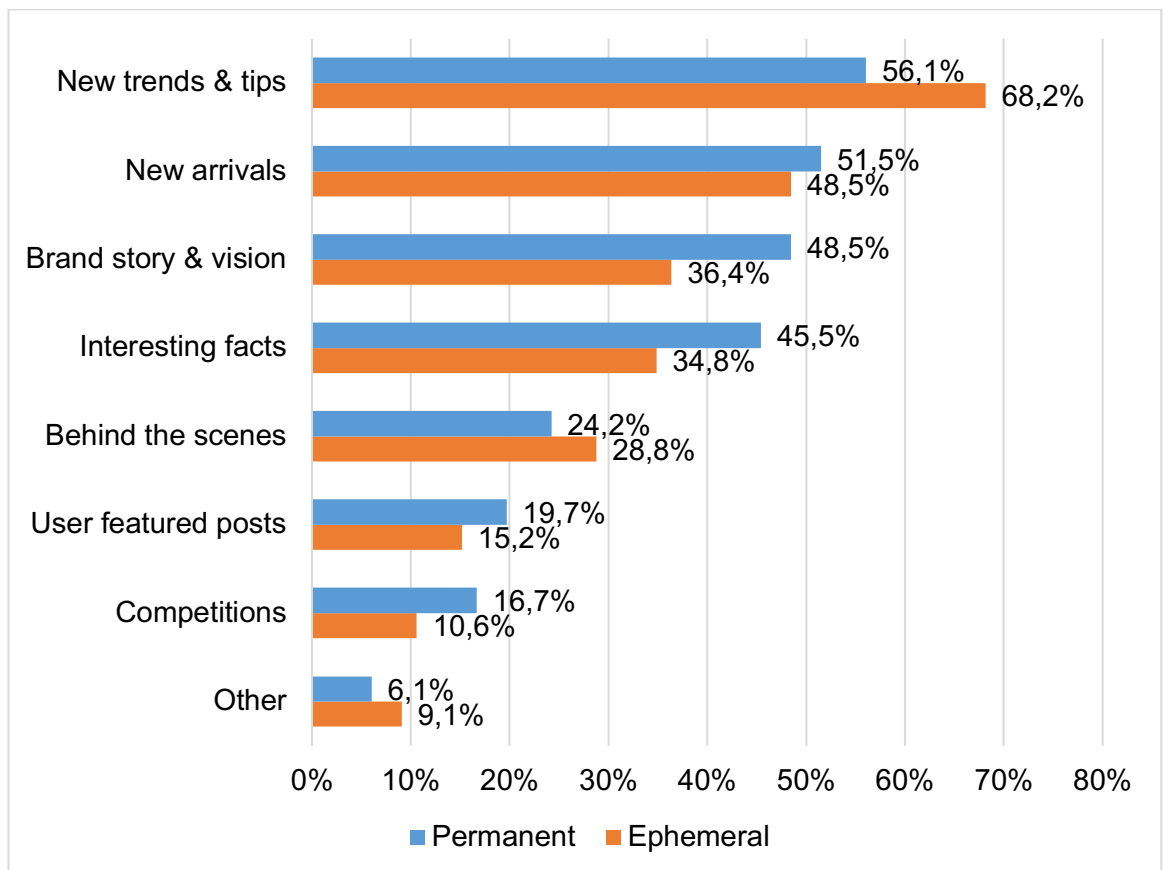


Figure 24. Content type preference in permanent and ephemeral postings (q03, q05)

The participants were asked an opinion on brand content and user-generated content (UGC) in permanent and ephemeral postings. As it was previously mentioned, permanent content scored higher for the brand theme (figure 25). Results on UGC show that from the respondents' perspective, there is no significant difference in this content application, and it could be used interchangeably in both permanent and ephemeral postings (figure 26); today, brands often use UGC in both content types (Newberry 12 March 2019).

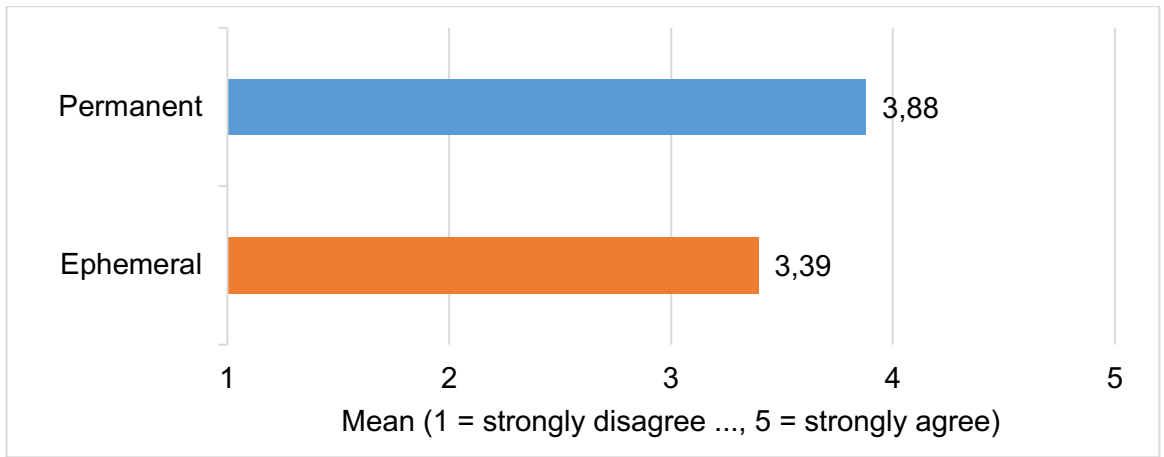


Figure 25. Brand image preference in permanent and ephemeral postings (q03, q05)

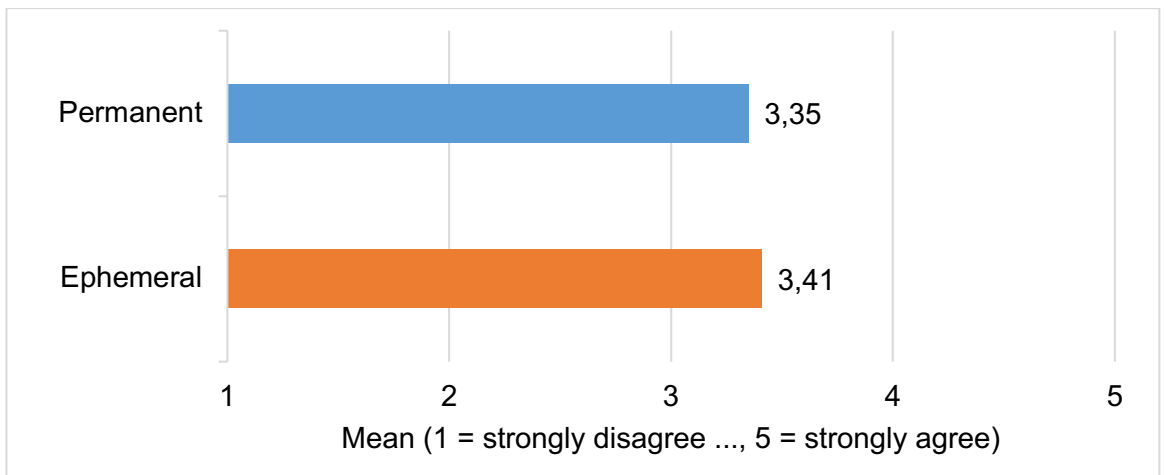


Figure 26. User generated content preference in permanent and ephemeral postings (q03, q05)

When it comes to content preference between brand and UGC for permanent postings, brand content scored higher (3.88) on means scale compare to UGC (3.35) (figure 27). In a similar content comparison, but for the ephemeral postings, there is no contrast in respondents' choice (figure 28).

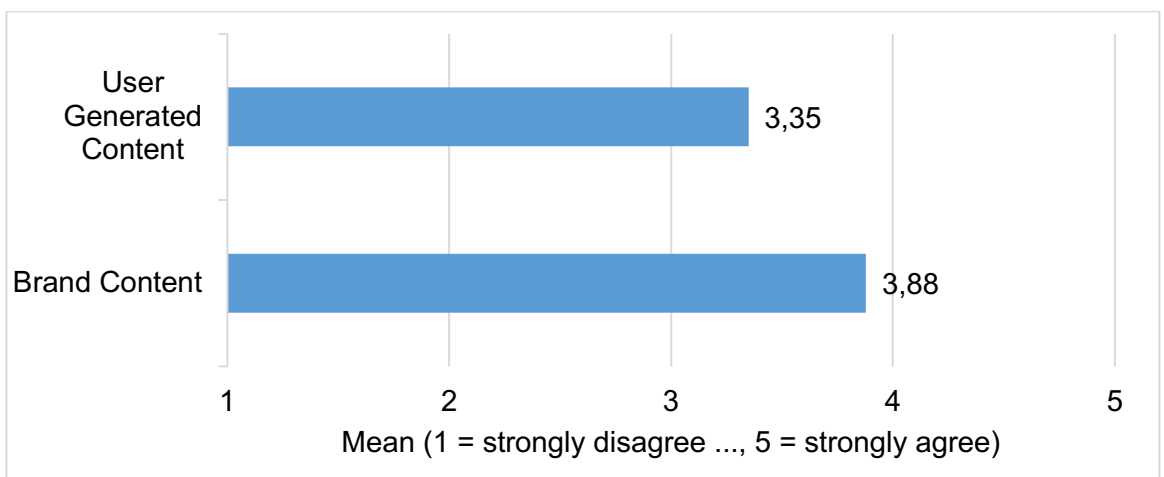


Figure 27. Brand vs UGC in permanent postings (q03)

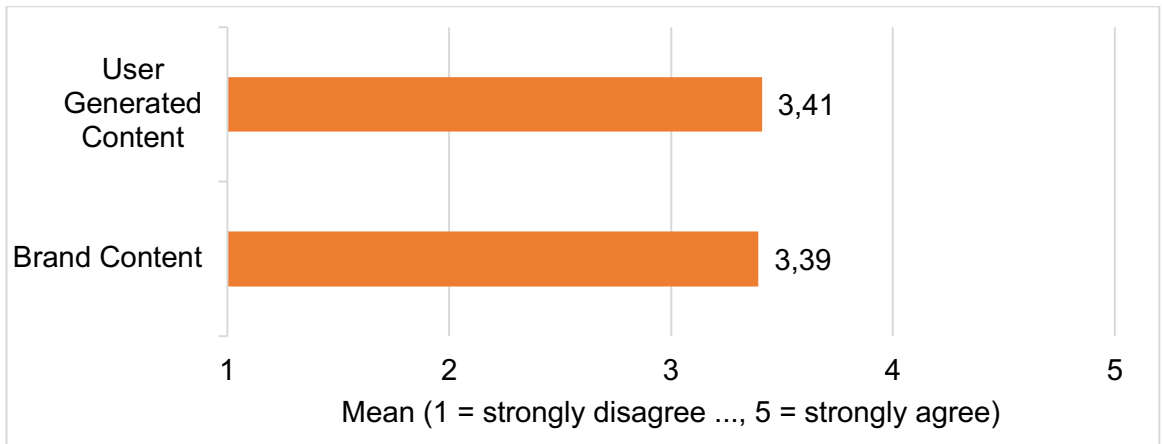


Figure 28. Brand vs UGC in ephemeral postings (q05)

The figure below shows that most of the respondents (36.4%) have neutral feelings toward interactive engagement from the brand side. A similar share of respondents (33.3%) agree that they prefer interactive ephemeral engagement from the brand when their opinion asked (figure 29). When it comes to gender split, females have more favorable opinions, with 36.6% agree and 17.1% strongly agree, while male respondents 25% agree, 29.2% disagree, and 4.2% strongly disagree (figure 30). Many of the positive opinions are coming from the youngest age group (58.2%) (20 to 29), and most of the negative and neutral responses are from the other two age groups (figure 31).

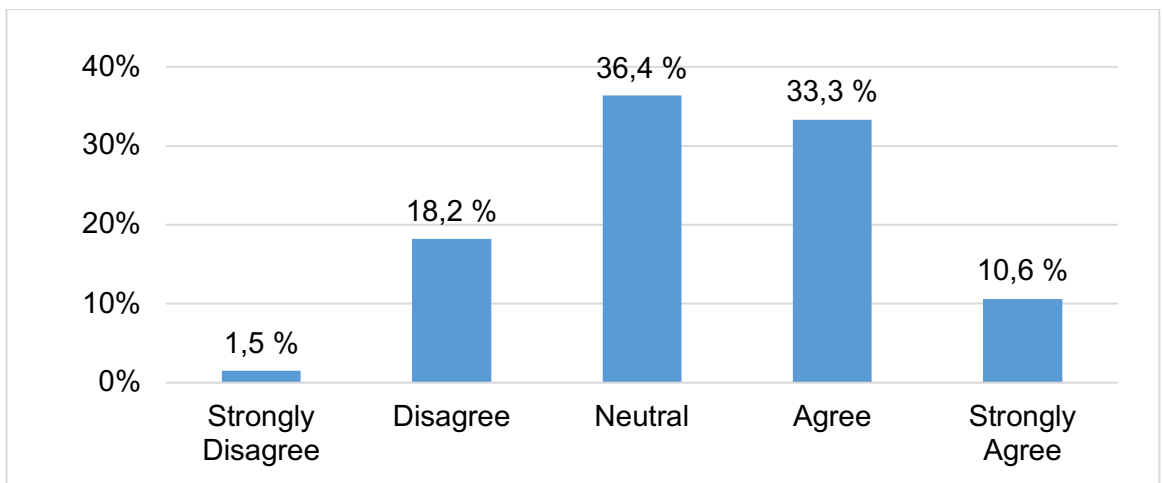


Figure 29. Preference on ephemeral content interactive brand engagement (q04d)

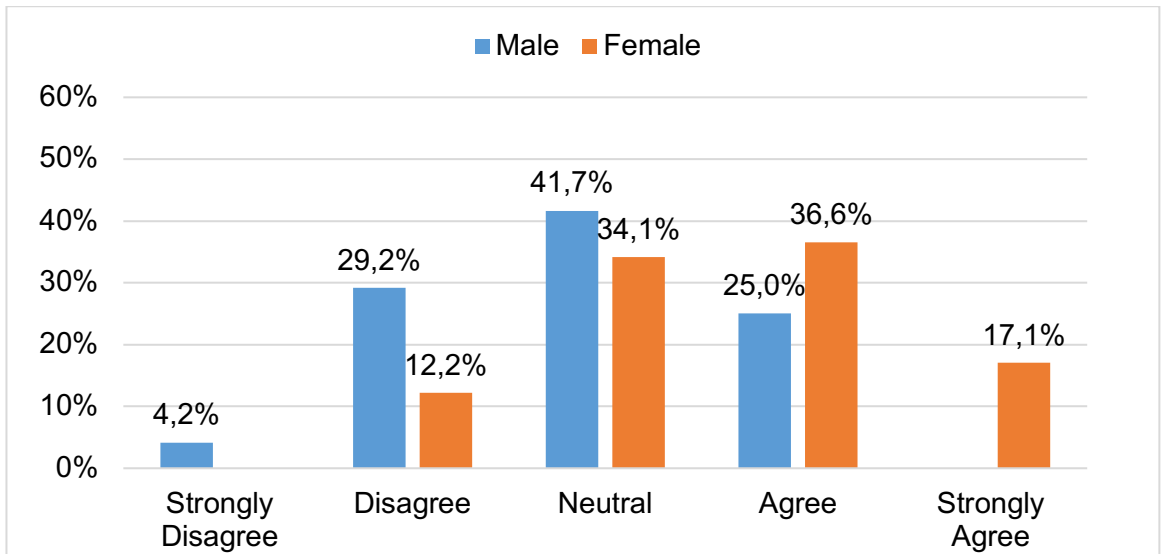


Figure 30. Preference on ephemeral content interactive brand engagement by gender (q04d)

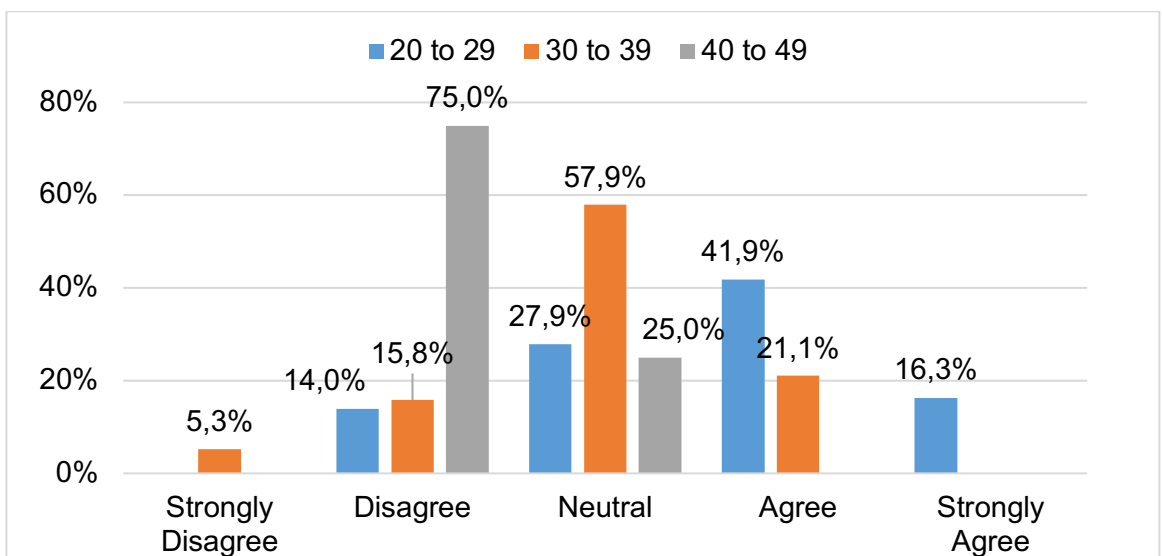


Figure 31. Preference on ephemeral content interactive brand engagement by age group (q04d)

In the context of the permanent posting, the respondents were asked several questions about copy text under the posting (also known as "caption"), its length and the comment section. According to the survey findings, 42.4% of respondents agree that caption is an important part of the posting and they read it (figure 32). Nevertheless, 47% agree that a long caption frustrates them, and 15.2% strongly agree with it (figure 33). Concerning the comment section, 83.3% of respondents unlikely to leave them (figure 34).

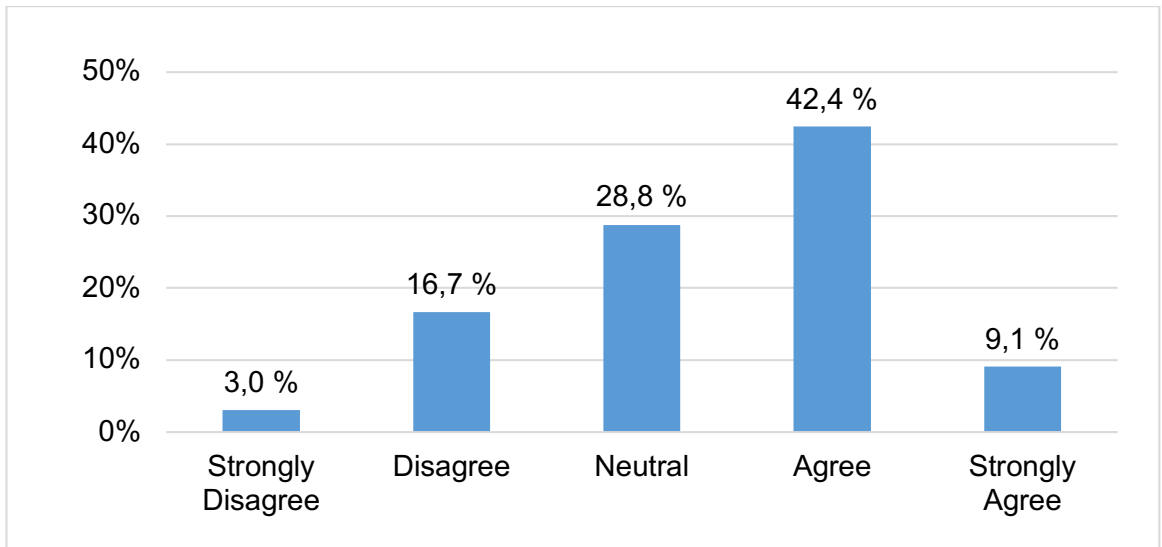


Figure 32. Significance of copy text under permanent posting (q06d)

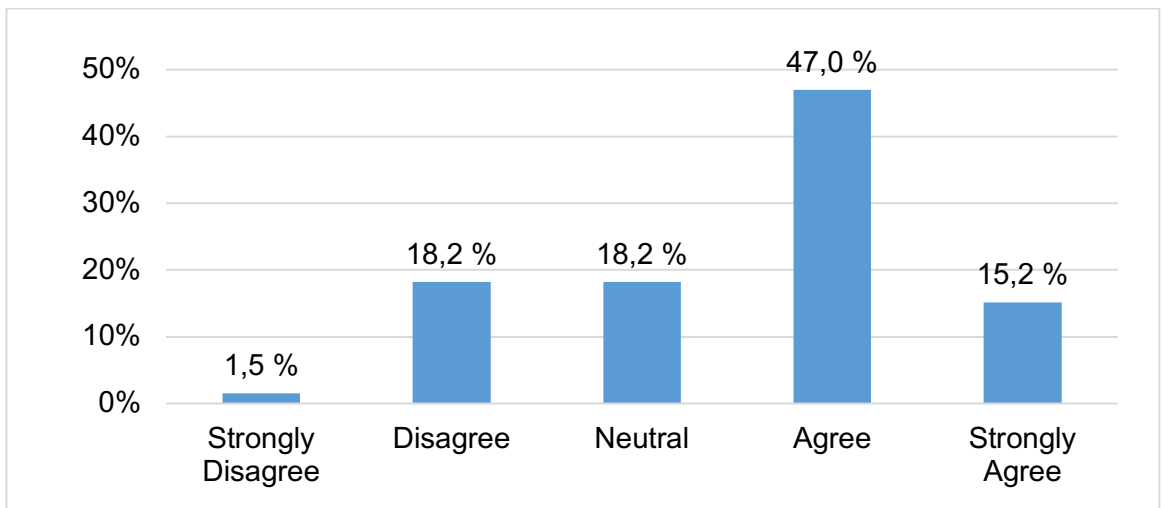


Figure 33. Opinion on the long copy text under permanent posting: "A long copy under the post frustrates me" (q06e)

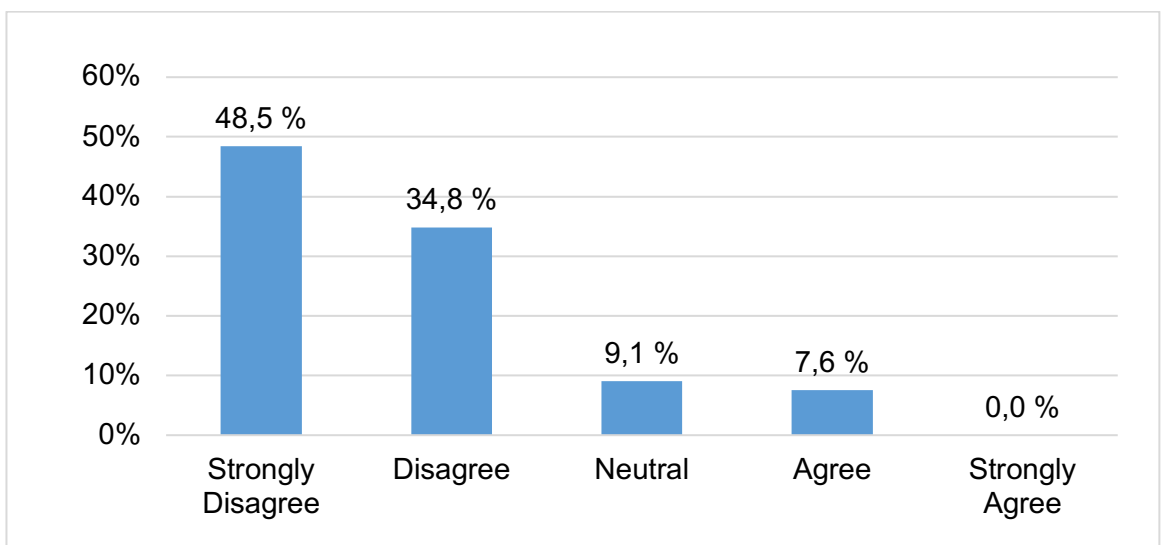


Figure 34. Opinion on commenting permanent postings: "I tent to leave comments under posts" (q06f)

#### 4.4 Investigative Questions 2

Participants were asked several questions that support IQ2: How permanent and ephemeral content influences consumer's purchasing decisions toward fashion eCommerce stores on Instagram? The findings of these questions will be covered in this sub-chapter.

The survey participants answered about their Instagram Shopping experience. It appears that 69.7% have not tried the feature, of which 22.7% consider using it, and 13.6% are not aware of the feature. In total, 13.6% have tried Instagram shopping, of which only 4.5% would likely use it again (figure 35). From the gender perspective, the majority of both genders, 82.9% of females and 50% of males have not used Instagram shopping. On a positive side, 26.8% of females and 16.7% of males consider using it someday. About 30% of male respondents were not aware of the feature, and respondents who have tried Instagram Shopping seem to have an equal gender split of 12% (figure 36).

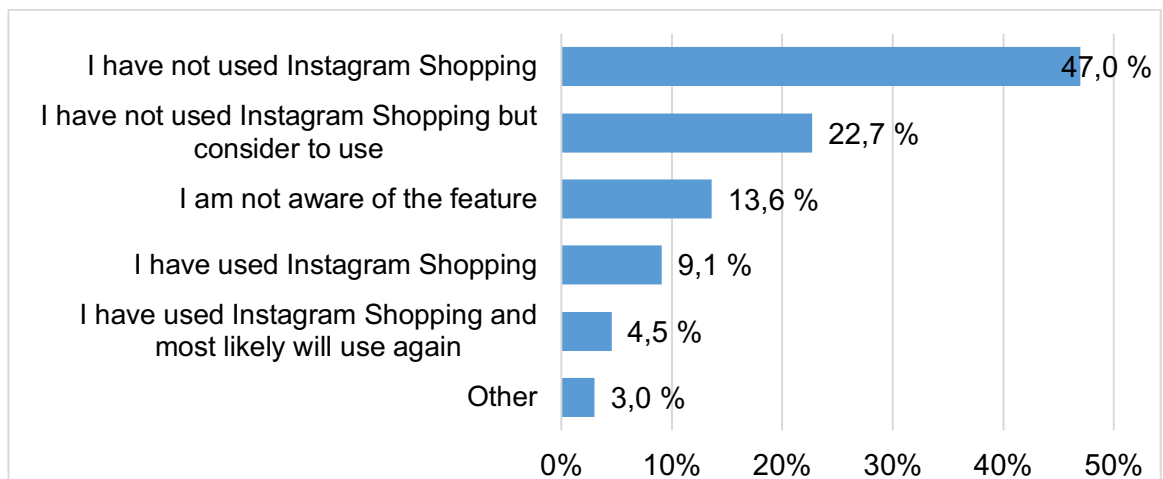


Figure 35. Instagram shopping experience (q07)

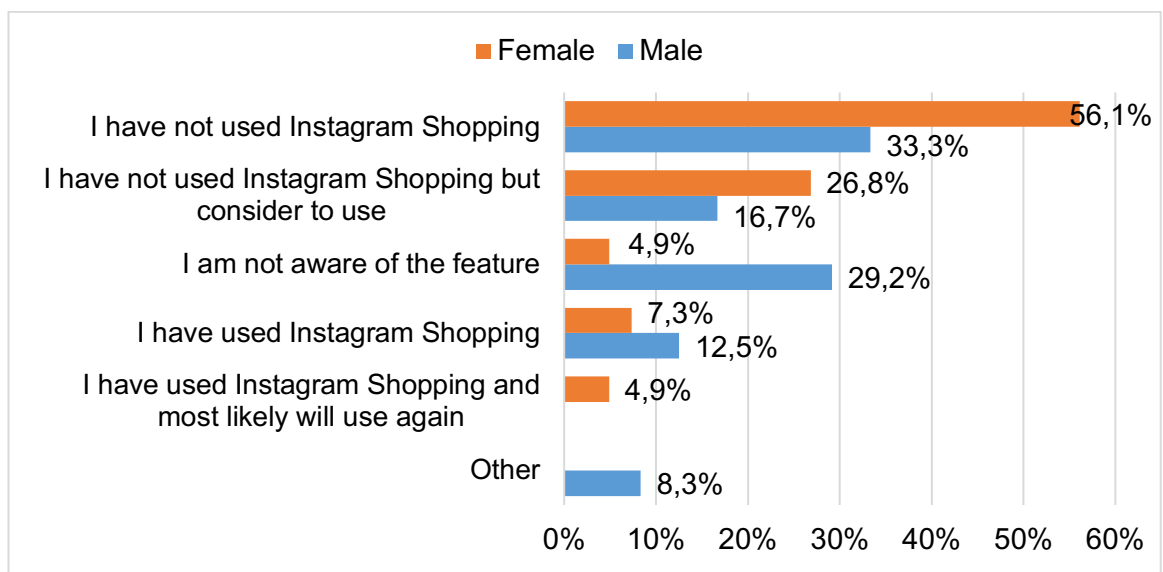


Figure 36. Instagram shopping experience across genders (q07)

In terms of shoppable post preference for permanent content, 47% of respondents did not have a strong opinion on the matter, perhaps due to the high number of participants who have not tried the feature (figure 36-37). 27.3% have agreed that they mostly review shoppable posts (figure 37).

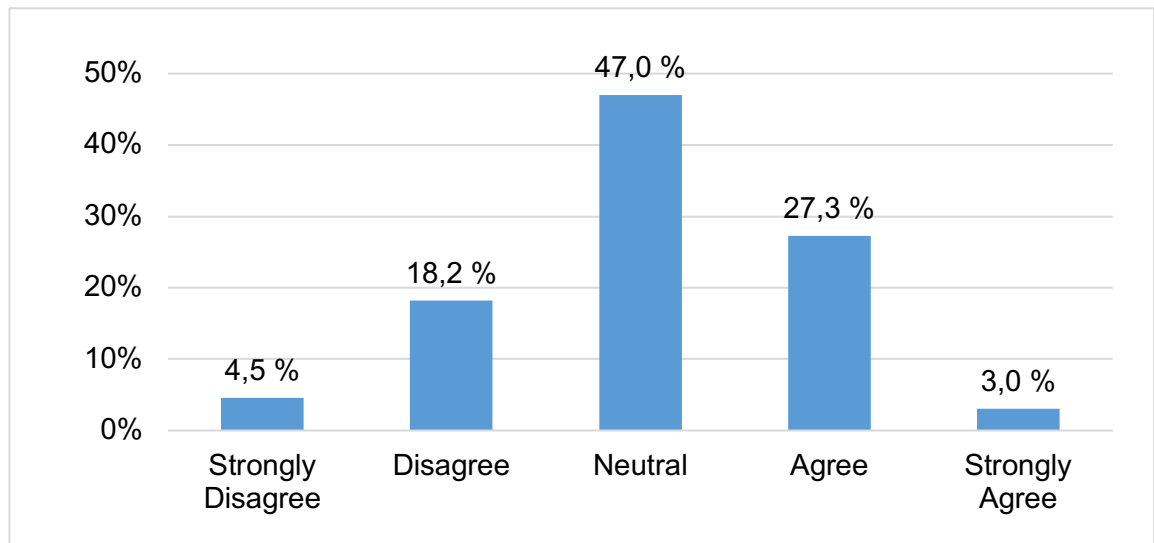


Figure 37. Opinion on the permanent shoppable posts: “I mostly review shoppable posts” (q06c)

The participants who have used Instagram Shopping were asked to evaluate their experience on the scale from 1 to 5. The 5 factors in consideration were: ease of use, speed, pleasant, frustration and usefulness. The answers on all criteria are quite average (3) or slightly below average (figure 38). Looking at the gender split, female respondents evaluated all criteria higher than male respondents (figure 39).

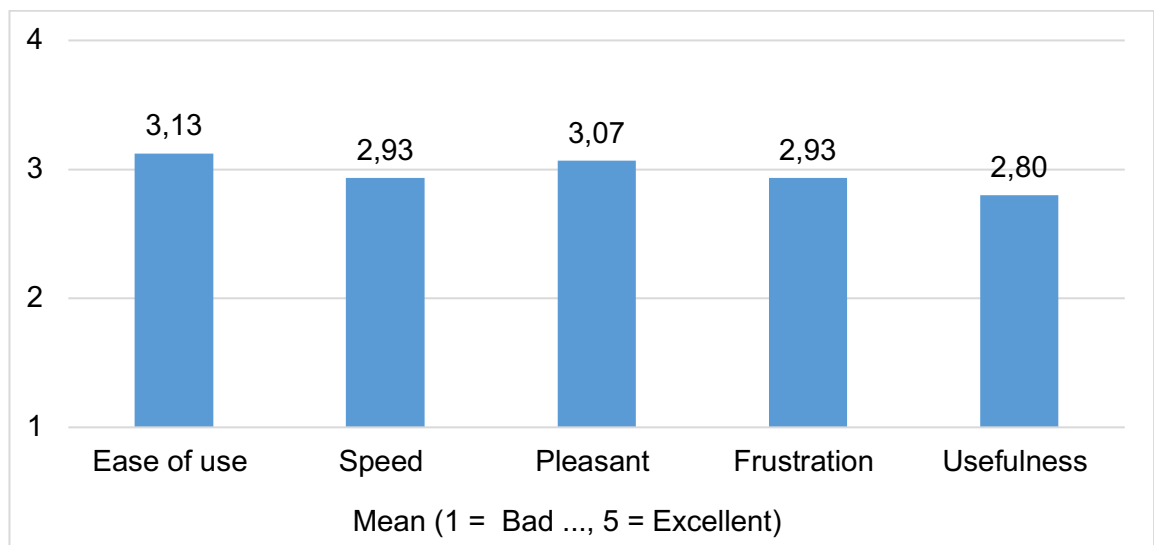


Figure 38. Instagram shopping evaluation (q08)

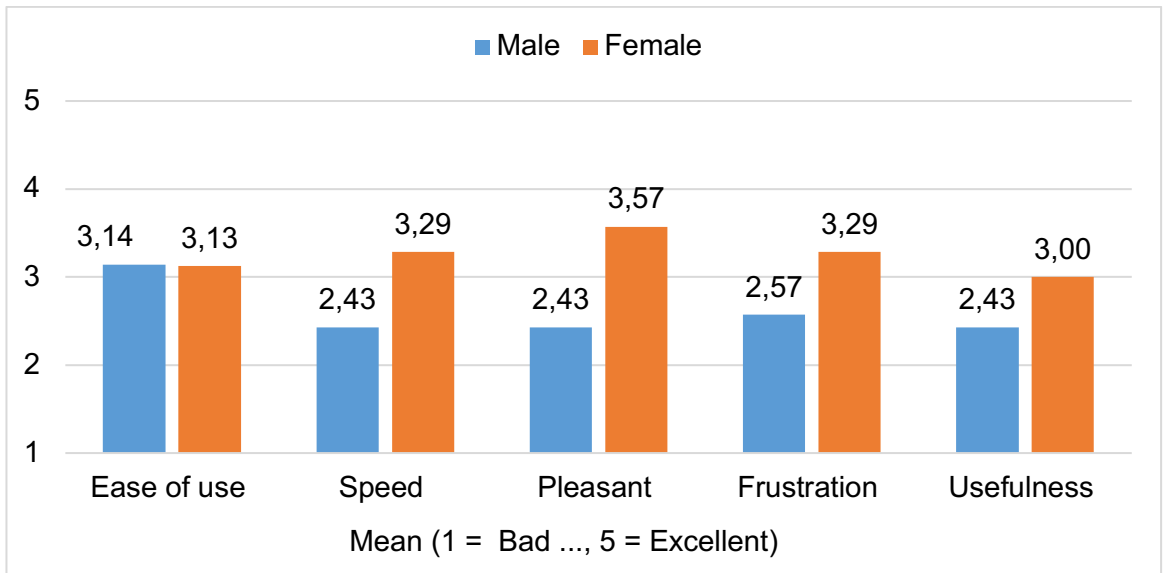


Figure 39. Instagram shopping evaluation by gender (q08)

Several questions were raised on the general opinion about Instagram Shopping. Based on the results presented in the figure below, 62.2% of participants agreed that they would buy on Instagram, and 50% agreed that Instagram Shopping is useful in terms of item and price visibility; 36.4% of respondents tent to save shoppable posts for later. Other factors in consideration have mainly neutral answers (figure 40). Such a high number of neutral responses can be explained by the lack of purchasing experience with Instagram Shopping.

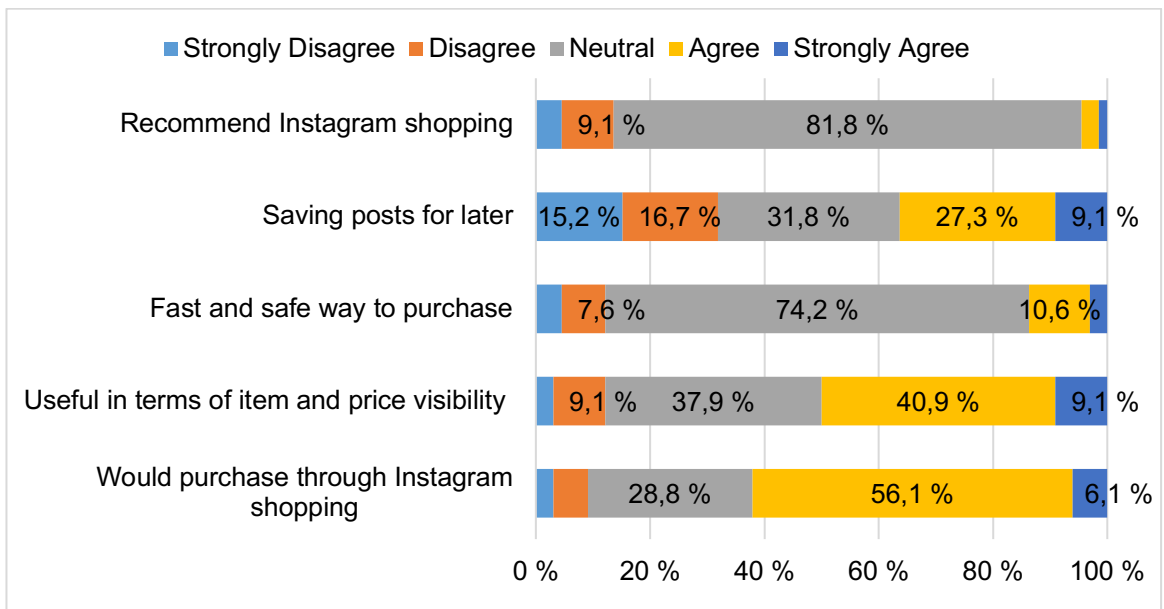


Figure 40. Opinion on Instagram shopping (q09)

The comment section under permanent postings is an important part of the content, with the majority of participants (48.4%) agree that they do read comments of

other people (figure 41) which supports theoretical reference to the fact that about 70% of online users trust the opinion of fellow online users (Newberry 12 March 2019).

The most significant share (58.4%) of positive answers are coming from male participants and 41.5% from female participants (figure 42). The process of reading comments of other users under shoppable posts can be considered as a filtering element in the customer purchasing motives (figure 16) (Dange & Kumar (2012, 9).

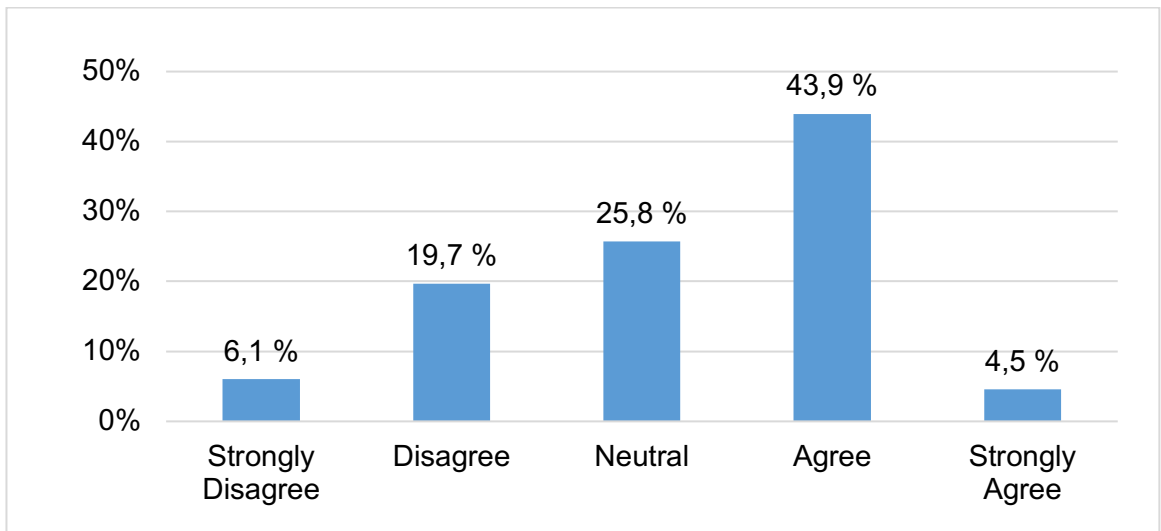


Figure 41. Significance of other people's comments: "I read comments of other people" (q06g)

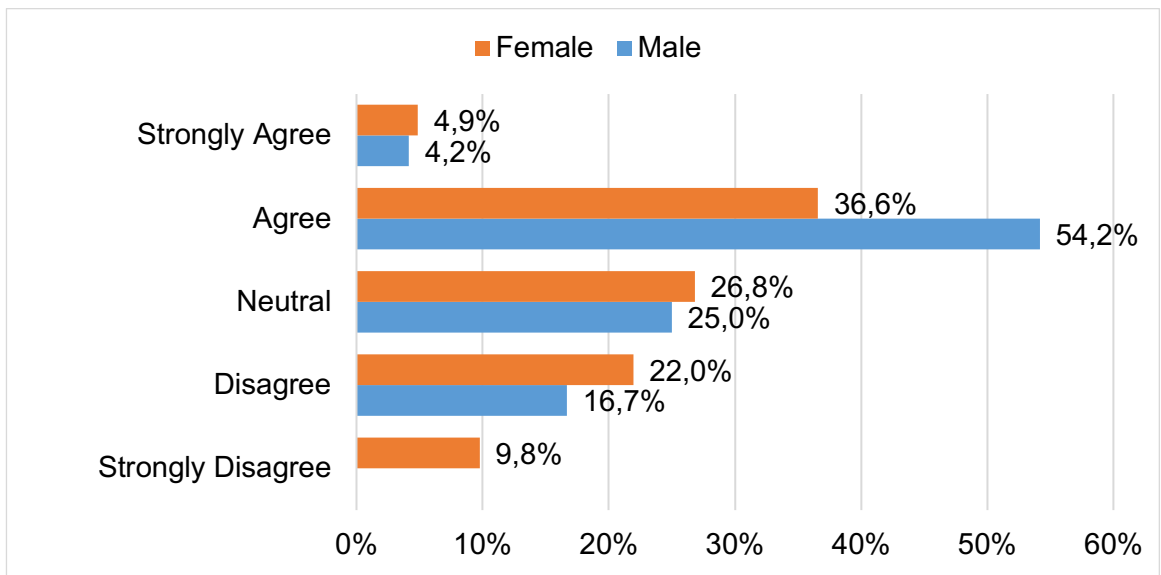


Figure 42. Significance of other people's comments by gender: "I read comments of other people" (q06g)

In respect to ephemeral content, 37.8% of respondents would "swipe up" to view the item on the site, and around the same amount (36.4%) would not (figure 41). From the gender standpoint, most of the females (48.8%) voted in favor, while for males, this number was

significantly lower (16.7%) (figure 42). Referring to the buyer decision process (figure 15), the “swipe up” step in the ephemeral consumer journey can be considered as an information search or evaluation of alternatives (Armstrong & Kotler 2017, 177).

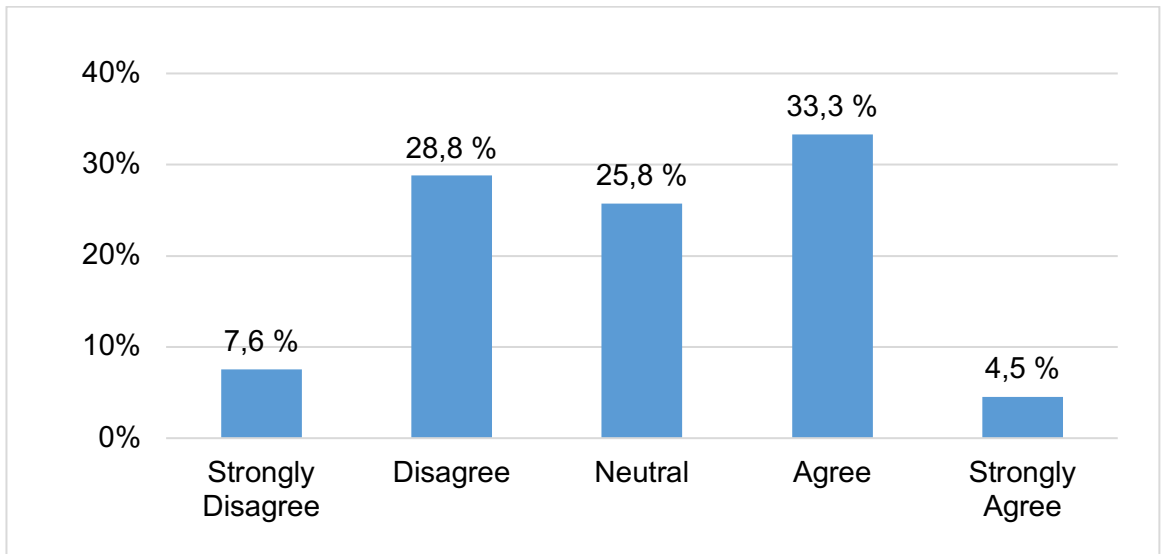


Figure 43. Opinion on ephemeral content: “I would likely ”swipe up” to see the item on the site” (q04c)

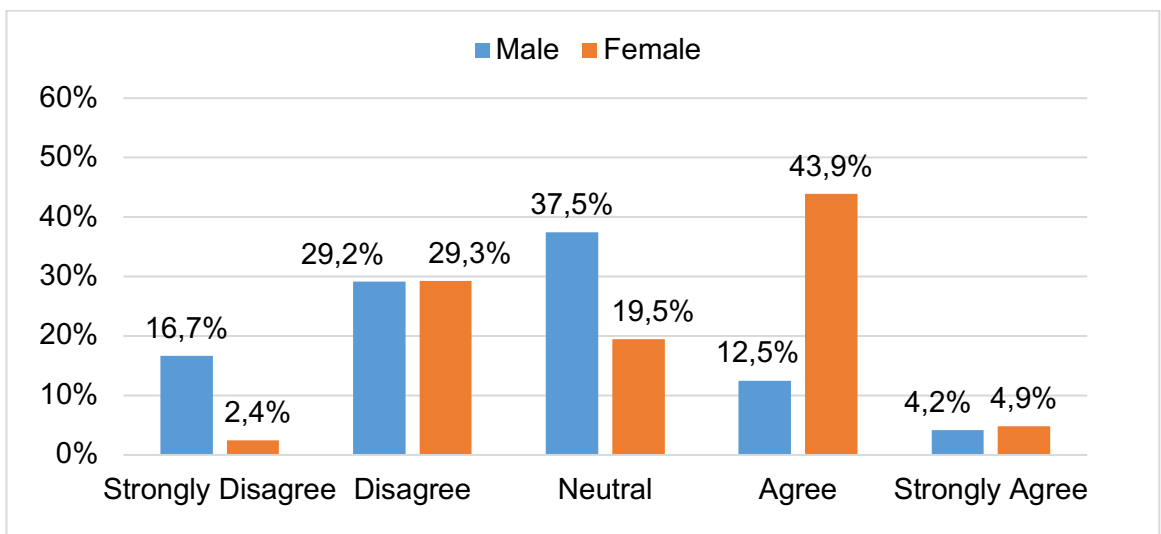


Figure 44. Opinion on ephemeral content by gender: “I would likely ”swipe up” to see the item on the site” (q04c)

## 5 Conclusions

This chapter will summarise the research results presented in the previous chapter. For efficient Instagram content application, fashion brands and clothing eCommerce stores should consider findings and recommendations listed in this chapter.

### 5.1 Reflections on the Research Results

The research results show that concerning clothing brands on Instagram, most of the respondents prefer permanent content over ephemeral. Even though the “story” format had been introduced already back in 2016 (Instagram 2020c), when it comes to shopping items, it seems that the audience has more trust in “feed” posts. Nevertheless, a substantial number of votes also reveal that the content preference greatly depends on the type of content in a posting. For instance, “new trends & tips” content theme was selected by both genders as the most preferred one and had the highest scores in both content categories, but with the visible distinction, this content type is more suited for “story” format. Scored as the third and fourth the most preferred, with opposite results, “brand story & vision” and “interesting facts” themes are best to be applied in “feed” postings. The “new arrivals” theme is the second in the content preference list with no significant difference in content type application; it equally welcomed in both permanent and ephemeral postings. Organized in preference order and with a small percent difference, the rest of the themes “behind the scenes”, “user featured posts” and “competitions” can be also used in both content types. Considering brand content and UGC, in permanent postings audience shows more preference toward brand content but still wants UGC presence. In ephemeral postings, both content types could be used equally.

The youngest age group (20 to 29) that participated in the survey is the most active in terms of daily Instagram usage. Compare to other age groups, the youngest one has more trust in ephemeral content and does not mind interactive postings. Female participants of all age groups demonstrate a more positive attitude toward Instagram shopping activities and general.

Instagram introduced the in-app shopping feature in 2018 (Instagram 2020e), but it seems that this additional permanent content functionality was not yet adopted by the majority of users, and, for many, it remains as “new” and untested feature; this equally applies to both genders. Based on the research results, a significant amount of users do save shoppable posts and consider trying Instagram shopping. Regarding shopping under ephemeral content via “swipe up to see on the site”, the results show a similar level of uncertainty as with

permanent shopping. In both cases, male users demonstrate a much lower level of awareness and desirability toward the shopping features in general.

The study also revealed that, for many, permanent posting caption is a crucial part of the posting and users do pay attention to it. Although if the caption copy text is too long, then it causes frustration. As for comment sections, it appears that the majority prefer not to leave any comments. However, a considerable number of respondents admitted that they do read other people's comments.

## 5.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the research results, the table below presented the suggested content themes application. The themes are organized in the order of importance defined by the survey respondents. All listed themes can be used in both content types but with an emphasis on a particular type (table 5).

Table 5. Suggested content theme application

<b>Order of importance</b>	<b>Content theme</b>	<b>Content application</b>
1	New trends & tips	Both content types with emphasize on ephemeral
2	New arrivals	Both content types with emphasize on ephemeral
3	Brand story & vision	Both content types with emphasize on permanent
4	Interesting facts	Both content types with emphasize on permanent
5	Behind the scenes	Both content types with emphasize on ephemeral
6	User featured posts	Both content types
7	Competitions	Both content types

As there is no specific rule for these content categories application, all mentioned themes and recommendations on certain preferences are based on this research results and, in a real context, still might depend on the specifics of the information communicated in the content.

When planning a caption for permanent posts, brands need to consider the optimal length that will allow them to cover the essentials and not bore the users. The recommended Instagram caption length to engage and convert the audience is between 1 and 80 characters for organic posts (Shleyner 21 May 2018). In addition to the caption, brands should be cautious about comment sections to ensure that there is nothing that can disturb the

consumer journey. Ensuring positive engagement and feedback under the comment section can positively affect the product.

Considering user age groups and the research finding, the 20 to 29 age group is the most active when it comes to brand interaction and shopping. However, users from other age groups (30 to 39, 40 to 49) also have a strong Instagram presence and purchasing power. To drive more engagement and sales through Instagram, it is recommended to share content that will comfort the audience and showcase Instagram Shopping features and usability. UGC can be particularly useful in this context. Instagram Shopping popularity will rise and keep growing as more users will have experience with it.

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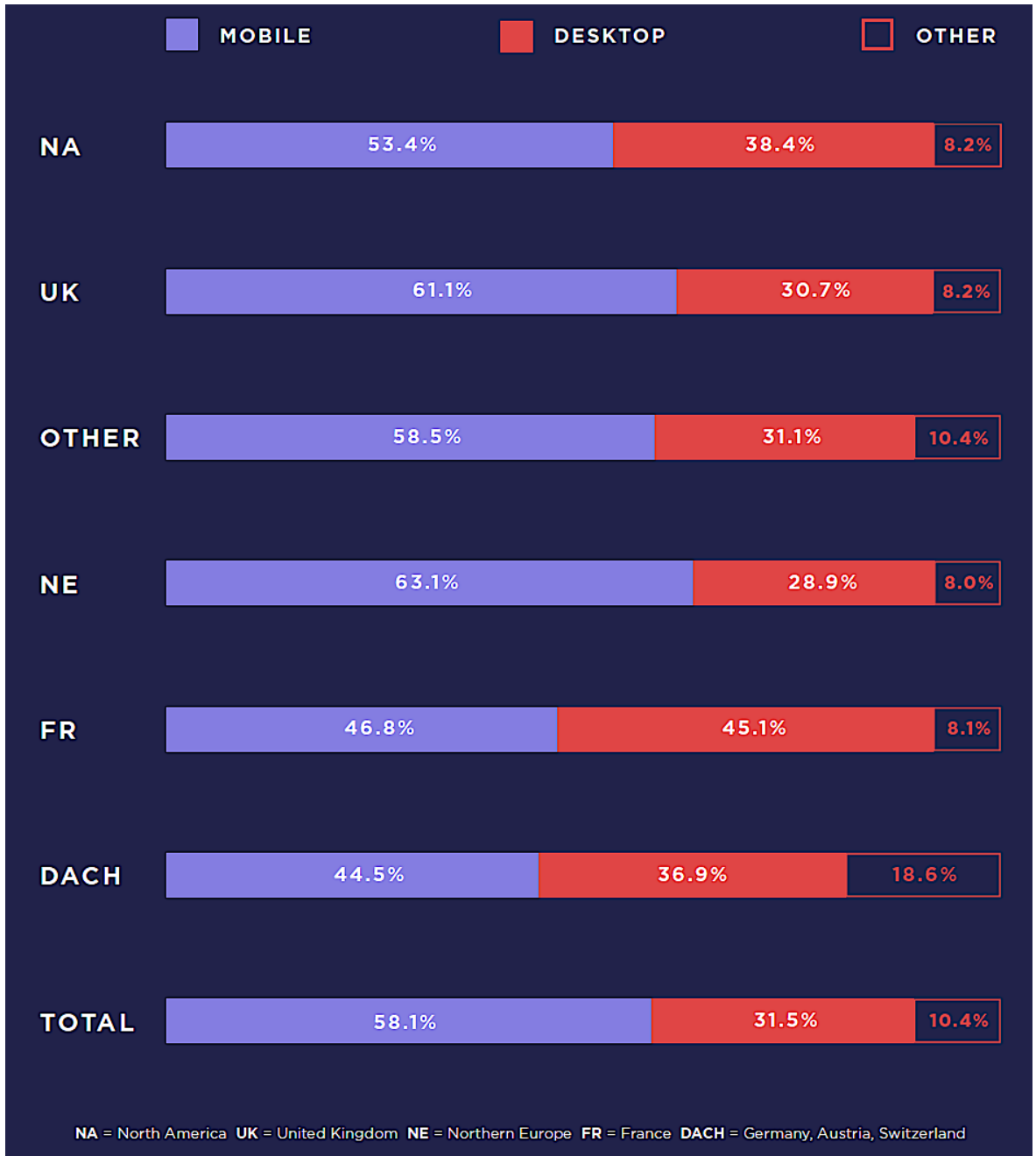
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# Appendices

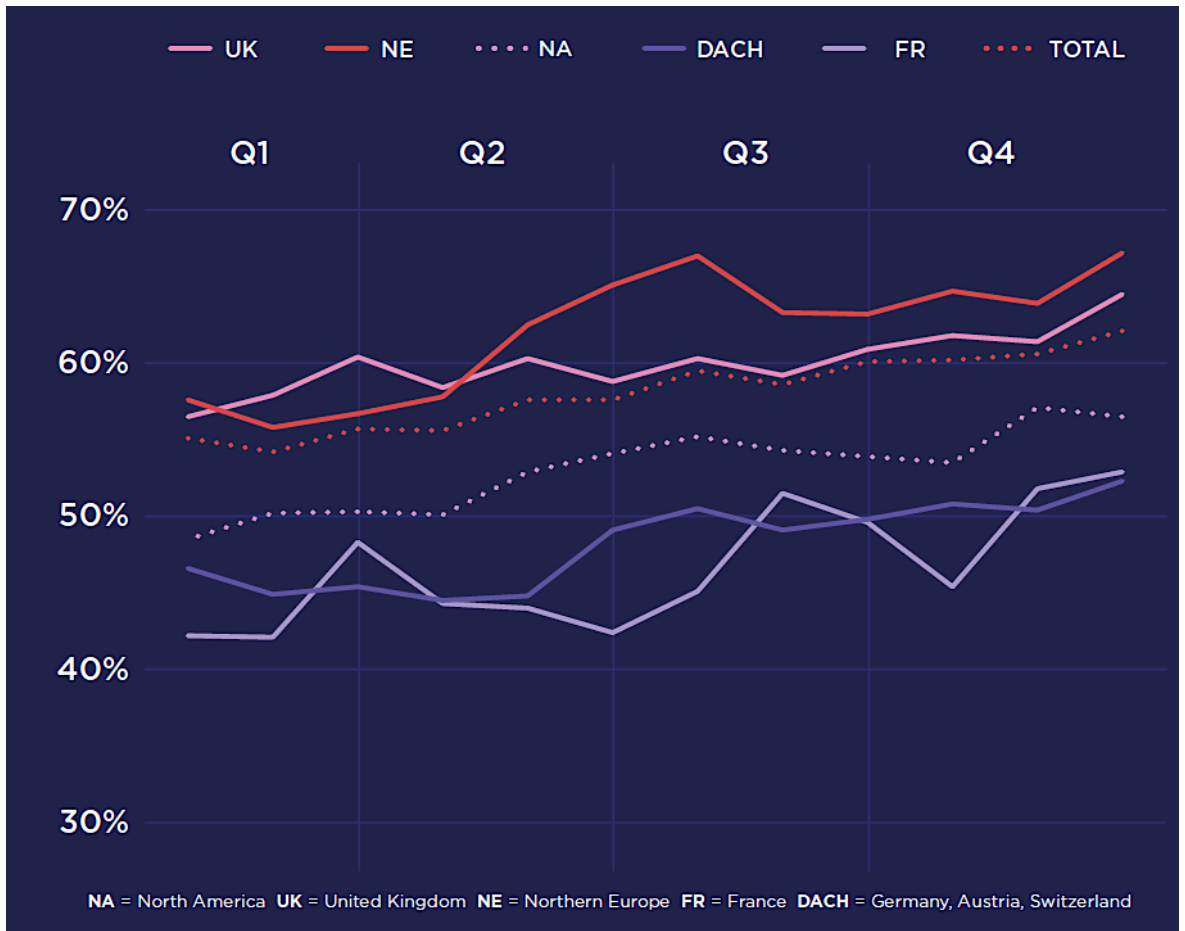
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## Appendix 2. Charts on eCommerce website traffic, mobile and desktop



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## Appendix 4. Quantitative Questionnaire

### Clothing Brands and eCommerce Instagram Content

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking your time to answer this anonymous survey. Your contribution is extremely important and very appreciated. The survey takes about 5 minutes to complete, and it aims to support the research on how consumers engage and interact with content published by clothing brands and eCommerce on Instagram.

1. How much time, on average, do you spend on Instagram daily? \*

- Under 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 5+ hours

2. When it comes to clothing brands on Instagram, do you prefer to see items in a **feed post** or **story**? \*

- Feed
- Story
- Depends on the content
- Does not matter
- Other

3. Please select 1-3 type of content you value the most in clothing brand **stories** on Instagram: \*

- Brand story & vision
- Interesting facts
- Competitions
- New trends & tips
- Behind the scenes
- User featured posts
- New arrivals

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I mostly review shoppable posts *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I read copy text under the feed post and consider it an important part of the whole posting *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A long copy text under the post frustrates me *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I tend to leave comments under posts *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I read other people comments *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**7. What is your experience with Instagram Shopping? \***

- I have used Instagram Shopping
- I have used Instagram Shopping and most likely will use again
- I have not used Instagram Shopping
- I have not used Instagram Shopping but consider to use
- I am not aware of the feature
- Other

**8. If you have purchased with Instagram Shopping, please scale your experience on the following criteria:**

	1 Bad	2 Poor	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent
Ease of use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frustration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Usefulness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**9. How much do you agree with the following statements about Instagram Shopping?**

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I will consider purchasing if I like the item	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a fast and safe way to purchase	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is useful in terms of item and price visibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I save for later shoppable posts with interesting items	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend Instagram Shopping to my friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**10. What is your gender? \***

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to specify

**11. Which age group do you belong to? \***

- Under 20
- 20 to 29
- 30 to 39
- 40 to 49
- 50 to 59
- Over 60