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INFLUENCER MARKETING via SOCIAL MEDIA

The Perceptions of Vietnamese Consumers

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Abstract

Influencer marketing is one of the trendiest marketing tools on social media today. Hence, it is of crucial importance to study viewpoints of the consumers who are daily exposed to influencer marketing content. The objectives of this thesis were set to explore the perceptions of Vietnamese consumers regarding influencer marketing and to measure the impacts of this marketing practice on brands.

Both quantitative and qualitative researches were conducted. An online survey was spread to mass social media users to collect generalisable sentiments and it was filled in by 120 Vietnamese respondents. 3 sequential interviews were carried out to gather more insights and subjective viewpoints so as to build a deeper understanding on the generalised data.

Overall, the results show positive impacts on consumers perceptions of brands thanks to influencer marketing, including making consumers feel closer to brands and giving brands vibrant characters. Regardless of the positive impacts, trust issues were found in consumers. Consumers see influencers as a supportive channel in their journey of purchase. Influencer marketing as a practice creates more positive social media experience for users. Insights from the qualitative research further elaborate on the trust issues and points out the problems in the approaches by which brands and influencers reach out to their target audience.

Keywords

influencer marketing, social media, branding, digital landscape in Vietnam

CONTENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

We are living in the digital age where technology is becoming more advanced and sophisticated every day, leading to people shifting to the internet for daily obtaining and sharing of information. There are many reasons behind this shift, ranging from the development of internet infrastructure, advancement of technologies to prevalence of social platforms. The global internet penetration at the beginning of 2017 is 50% (+10% since 2016) in the total of 7.4 billion people (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017a, 5-6). Social media are among the most popular platforms for internet users as 37% of the world population were active social media users (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017a, 8), and have become an important and to most people, an indispensable part of our lives. The average time spent online globally was nearly 2 hours in 2016 (Statista, 2016) and in countries where their citizens are active online the most, approx. 3-4 hours are spent every day for social media (We are Social & Hootsuite, 2017a, 45).

Brands have long begun taking advantage of these robustly growing digital platforms, in fact, 2017 is predicted to be the first year where digital ad spending will surpass traditional ad budgets (Edelman 2017a, 16). Social media is new powerful tools to reach out to their consumers and the methods are getting more diversified and creative (Noor & Henricks 2011, 110). Among those methods is influencer marketing whereby marketers use influential social media users ranging from bloggers, internet personalities to celebrities etc. to promote their products/services or to communicate with their consumers via social media. This is type of digital Word of Mouth marketing (WOM) – eWOM. Edelman (2017a, 16), one of the world's leading communication marketing agency, predicts that influencer marketing will dominate the marketing trends and drive "business impact" in 2017.

1.2   Research problem

Most of the measurements for influencer marketing campaigns are based on data collected from analysing, reporting tools and on sales reports, such as interactions, buzz generation, tracking via coupon codes or completed forms, and sales lead etc. Studies on the audience perceptions and attitudes toward brands as a result of influencer marketing are seldom to be found. This lack of resources is intriguing as human perceptions are varied and intangible. One can come across and click 'Like' on one branded post of an influencer but on the other hand, (un)intentionally turn a blind eye to the brand being mentioned. Moreover, as how each internet user chooses to engage to a content depends on their personal traits (Zailskaitė-Jakštė et al, 2016, 72), one can withdraw from expressing anything at all publicly on the social media platform but still be positively impressed by the brand messages. Hence numerous data cannot represent 100 percent accurately the generalised outcomes of influencer marketing campaigns. How consumers see influencers throughout the buying decision making process will be explored to find any significant impact influencer marketing has on consumer purchasing behaviours.

In addition to how influencer marketing affects consumers evaluation of brands, this thesis is also investigating how social media users feel about influencer marketing as a marketing tool. The goal is to understand the knowledge and the sentiments of consumers toward influencer marketing on social media, in other words, to gain insights of the other end in influencer marketing campaigns (the first end being brands and specialists).

This research was conducted in Vietnam where the digital landscape in is dynamic and flourishing, so is the influencer marketing industry. Having experiences working with campaigns using influencers in Vietnam, I noticed the lack of depths in the measurement tools while I was doing reports. Moreover, I have always been curious about the real impacts of this new marketing tool on the audiences, such as "will they try out the brand promoted by their idol?", "do they get the message in this post or they just "Liked" because of the image of their idol?" etc. This is intangible and depends a lot on the characteristics of a

person and such, so in my opinion, insights from consumers are extremely necessary and will give brands and marketers a significant competitive edge when designing their social media campaigns using influencers. Since social media revolve around users, these campaigns should try to understand their audience as the core element to reach the maximal efficiency (Kelly 2016, Wright et al 2010, 73-84; Zhu & Chen 2015, 340). Learn the consumers, just like learning the enemy in Sun Tzu's saying: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

1.3   Research objective, research questions and limitations.

The objectives of this thesis are to discover the effects of social media influencer marketing on consumer minds which are hardly shown using traditional measurement tools and to get to know how the social crowd feels about this new trend of marketing in a big picture. My ultimate goal is to understand the consumer point of view. I hope that my work will be beneficial to brands and marketing communication (marcom) specialists that want to develop a communication strategy using influencers, especially in Vietnam; to researchers who wish to use this thesis as a reference or as a base for their own projects; and to those who want to learn about influencer marketing.

This thesis comprises a series of an online survey and interviews designed for social media users in Vietnam to examine:

- The impacts on brand generated by using influencers on social media.
- The role of Influencers in Consumer Journey.
- Social media users' perceptions of influencer marketing on Social Media.

As this thesis is to explore consumers perspectives on influencer marketing on social media (in this case are mainly Facebook and Instagram since most of the influencer marketing practices happen on these two platforms) and this marketing practice in general, tactics for successfully winning consumers is not part of this

thesis. Brands and marcom specialist viewpoints will not be studied. However, this thesis can be used as a source for specialists to build their own toolkits.

1.4   Research methodology

Qualitative and quantitative methodology were used in this research, or mix methods, to achieve its maximal capacity to gather data and understand the matters (Weathington et al 2012, 409). In Quantitative research, the researchers are usually considered "Positivists" who seek causes of phenomenon, test hypotheses and measure the presence and the differences among variables from statistical data and (Taylor 2016, 14). They aim for precision when measuring, for instance, consumer behaviour, perceptions or attitudes, with the purposes to describe, to predict, or to test a pre-set theory by analysing the statistical data emerged from coding, categorising and converting responses to numbers (Sachdeva 2008, 180-184). With this "black and white" approach, quantitative researchers are said to distinct their personal judgements from the data to ensure that the analysis is unbiased, which makes them often be criticised that they ignore cultural/subjective values and have limited opportunities to collect meaning and insights from respondents (Sachdeva 2008, 183; Silverman 2000, 5). Qualitative researches, on the other hand, are believed to deliver deeper comprehensions on social phenomenon (Silverman 2000, 8), to be able to develop possible theories from data – inductively and bring new perspectives into quantitative data (Weathington and Cunningham 201, 398), making sense of descriptive data (Taylor et al 2016, 17) and as argued by Ragin & Amoroso (2010, 123), to *'work up' one's research materials, to search for hidden meanings, non-obvious features, multiple interpretations, implied connotations, unheard voices.* Qualitative researchers blend themselves into the phenomenon to produce detailed and deep descriptions of people, events and or whatever their study objects can be, with more focus on the context and the richness of data rather than the quantity, and from there analyse their data which texts are mostly describing their study objects, notes or transcripts, to answer the question Why than the question What (Sachdeva 2008, 183). While quantitative researchers are criticised that they overlook insights and complications of the

data, qualitative researchers are criticised by the fact that their works can be skewed by their personal judgement and bias (Weathington et al 2012, 400).

Upon reflecting the comparison of the two research methodologies above, I acknowledged that having the two approaches complementing each other would give this thesis the ability to overcome the drawbacks of each methods and to study the subject matter in a deeper and broader sense, and furthermore enhance the reliability and validity of this thesis. Most importantly, I had the resources and enough confidence to execute this research style. All the above combined, I feel that mix-methods is the answer for this thesis, with the sequential explanatory style, meaning a quantitative research would be carried out first, followed by a qualitative research.

Quantitative research, in the form of an online survey, was conducted first to gather general responses and qualitative research would follow to seek deeper understanding by insights and explanations. I want to achieve generalisation and representativeness from the responses out the mass crowd to find out the patterns of the consumers perceptions of influencer marketing, hence engaging in quantitative research which is claimed to satisfy this purpose (Silverman 2000, 102). On the other hand, I wish to collect personal and insightful responses, which can be achieved using Qualitative research (Keller 2013, 339; Silverman 2000, 8), with Interview method. The approach genre is Phenomenology, which is defined as the study to the intrinsic values and the essentials of a phenomenon (Saldaña 2011, 7).

Therefore, this thesis used Triangulation data collection and this combination would provide more sophisticated data and reinforce the comprehension of the matter (Weathington et al 2012, 400).

1.5   Structure of thesis

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of this thesis. Chapter 1 is going to introduce the background as well as discuss the academic aspects of the research. Chapters from 2 to 5 are going to discuss relevant theories and concepts as well as the

digital landscape in Vietnam. Research process is elaborated transparently in Chapter 6 and the results, analysis of results, summary and discussion are the main contents in chapter 7 and 8.

INTRODUCTION	• Introduce thesis background • Define Research objectives, Research problems, Limitations and Research methodology
CONCEPTUAL BASIS	• Elaboration of the digital landscape, social media ecology and influencer marketing realm • Literature reviews on relevant concepts on brands & consumers
RESEARCH PROCESS	• Quantitative research results collection first • Designing and collecting in-depth data to be followed.
FINDINGS & CONCLUSION	• Analysis of collected data • Research findings and implications

Figure 1 Thesis Flow

2 SOCIAL MEDIA

2.1 Social media in brief

Social media (consumer-generated media) is a brilliant invention in this 21st century, started out early in the 2000s and now almost one third of the world population is using it as an integrated part of their daily communication. We all know the name and most of us have one account or even more, but can everyone be sure about the definition?

Designed with web 2.0 technology, social media is an environment of sites and services" on which information is generated, circulated, discussed, modified and used by the users along their social connections to express themselves and their opinions on certain things as well as to share knowledges of products, brands,

services or issues (societal, political, daily-life etc.) (Kietzmann et al 2011, 241; boyd 2014, 6; Standage 2013, 250; Blackshaw & Nazzaro 2006, 2).

Social media comprises of a variety of "online word-of-mouth" flora such as blogs, chat tools, personal email, service reviewing websites, digital discussion boards and social networking platforms and the list continues (Mangold & Faulds 2009, 358; Highfield 2016, 6). Top popular social media platforms are Facebook, YouTube and Instagram respectively (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017a, 46).

Facebook: Launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his friends at Harvard for the student community at the university with the original purpose (and still is) was to connect people and to find people sharing similar interests. After 13 years of constant expansion globally, the founder announced the milestones of this social networking site for reaching 2 billion users in June 2017 on Facebook (Zuckererg 2017). Facebook is the King of social networks (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017a, 46), appealing to users from all demographic groups and from consumers to business with specific needs and desires by continuously upgrading its data and algorithms to bring the best user interfere and better ads delivering, hence improve user experience and advertising efficiency (Treadaway & Smith 2012, 35-36).

YouTube: the most popular video sharing channel at www.youtube.com, launched in 2005. Users can upload, watch, rate and comment on videos, add videos to their lists and subscribe to other channels. A Youtube account is linked to other Google services such as Gmail and Google Plus. YouTube users range from governmental agencies, media, organisations, celebrities to individuals. Today YouTube has more than one billion users and half of the video consumption comes from mobiles (YouTube 2017). YouTube (2017) also reports that several billion hours of videos are watched by billions of views.

Instagram: The runner-up in the ranking of social media 2016 (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017a, 46). Instagram is a content sharing (pictures and videos) website and mobile application which allows users to connect, like, comment,

repost, and send messages among each other. This site has become a popular tool for people to share their daily lives through photography (Mattern 2017, 07). Celebrities and influential people around the world use Instagram to communicate with their fans and keep them updated upcoming projects. Similar to Facebook, Instagram, though designed for social purposes, has evolved to adapt the business needs and become part of the marketing strategies with the foremost benefit this site brings is the active participations from consumers (Scholl 2015, 8).

Why people use social media

What makes social media so addicting that 2.78 billion people around the globe (37% of the total world population) (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017a, 38) are active on those platforms monthly? Looking at some attributes of social media such as Participation, Openness, Conversation, Community and Connectedness (Mayfield 2008, 5), these e-platforms are new open societies in a different, digital dimension which is interlinked to the real world. Similar to what people are doing in our real life, on social media, users are doing *self-branding* (Kelly 2014, 12). We are building our personal brands in order to seek validation from others, stay relevant, fight against "fear of missing out" (FOMO) and to showcase our egos. Ultimately, we want to be satisfied and content with our lives. Sheldon et al (2001, 419—435) pointed out 10 attributes of human satisfactions: *"autonomy, competence, relatedness, physical thriving, security, self-esteem, self-actualisation, pleasure-stimulation, money-luxury, and popularity-influence".* From these 10 needs, Zhu and Chen (2015, 336) argued that all social media have "social" as the "denominator", the sense of relatedness – the feeling of interpersonal connectedness, security in one's social circle and being appreciated by others (Greenwood et al 2013, 491), therefore, is fulfilled by using social media.

Social media is a virtual but not a separate world

Although social media exists on the internet, what happens on social media does not stay on social media. Social media has become an indispensable part of many people lives, and the online and offline worlds are "closely interlinked and

impact upon one another" (Highfield 2016, 7). Phillips (2015, 41) discussed our behaviours in both worlds as a phenomenon in which the "so-called real life necessarily bleeds into online life, and vice versa. Our raced, classed, and gendered bodies are encoded into our online behaviours, even when we're pretending to be something above or beyond or below what we "really" are IRL (in real life)". Contents we come across and pick up into our brains shape *our* reality of the real world and impact our behaviours offline. Consequently, it creates many opportunities for many parties and individuals to use social media to create and reinforce their influences on their target audiences, provoking actions among the audience.

2.2   Social media frameworks

In order to develop an effective strategic plan to communicate with the target audience, one should study the audience and the communication channel. Therefore, the honeycomb of which builds the social media ecology, developed by Kietzman et al (2011, 243-248) and the social media matrix which classifies platforms into 4 groups, developed by Zhu and Chen (2015) are introduced in this chapter. The two frameworks complement each other, break down social media not only to provide readers a more profound and sophisticated understanding but also allow readers, especially brands and marcom specialists to deduce implications for their strategic communication plans using social media.

2.2.1   The honeycomb of social media functionality

The honeycomb, which is illustrated in Figure 2, of social media functionality exhibits 7 constructing elements of social media – 7 aspects from which audiences can be analysed:
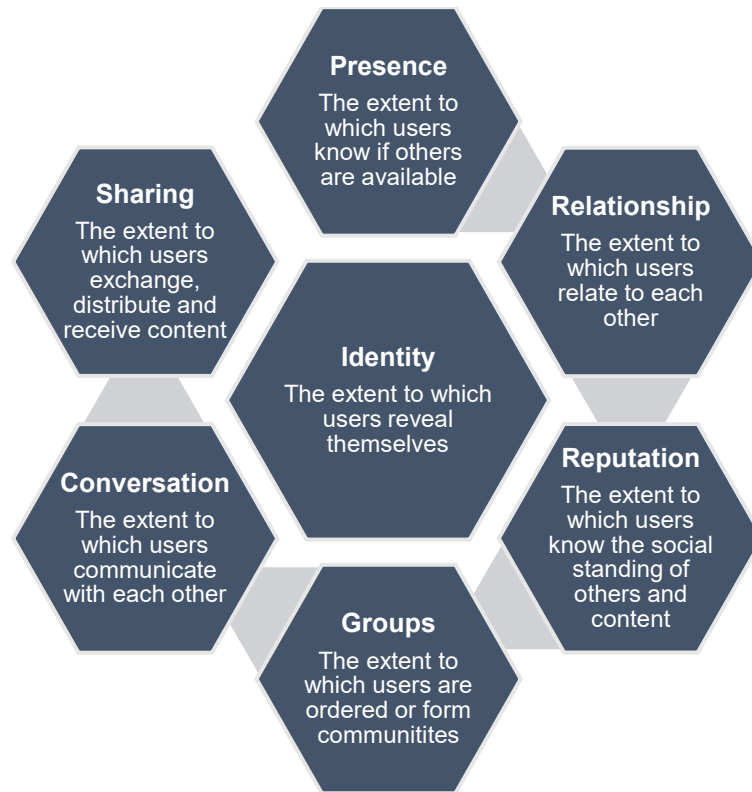
Figure 2 The social media honeycomb by Kietzman et al (2011)

In the discussion of Kietzman et al (2011, 243) about the *Identity* facet, users showcase their identities in social media setting with personal information ranging from practical (name, age, gender, origin to subjective and professional) to subjective (interest, hobbies and perspectives). Kaplan & Haelein (2010, 62) also discuss Identity suggesting that social users wish to control others' impressions of them for rewards and to present images of themselves which are consistent with their personal identities on social media.

Conversation – the extent of the talks among social media users. According to Kietzmann et al (2011, 244), people communicate with other people to find users sharing mutual values, seek friendships and love interests, boost their self-esteem, become pioneers in trends as well as to let their messages come across and create impacts on others.

Sharing – the extent of content circulation among social media users. In online networks, users are interconnected by a common shared object, but how an individual is associated to another varies, hence the difference in the objects

being shared and their functions (e.g. to share information to let others know, to show opinions, to express support, to call for votes or to win a promotion campaign etc.). (Kietzman et al 2011, 245.)

The *Presence* block discusses about the disclosure of a user's availability and accessibility, for instance information of one's current location in real world. This block is said to be a bridge connecting real and virtual world by giving users a chance to gather together offline if they share geographical proximity. (Kietzman et al 2011, 245.)

Relationship represents the degree to which one user is related to another user. The authors defined "relate" as how two or more users are associated to each other which affects how and about what they communicate (whether they talk, share "objects of sociality", meet up offline or just stay in the list of online friend or fan). The nature of relationships between users on a social media platform determines what and how they share information with each other. Whether a person is influential or not in one's circles can be deduced from the size, the density of one's portfolio of relationships and one's position in that portfolio, as influencers tend to have wider, denser network and they share the central voice. (Kietzman et al 2011, 246.)

The *Reputation* block relates to the standing of social media users and how they acknowledge that of themselves and of others. Although how Reputation is identified varies across platforms, trust remains the most common criterion. However, since such qualitative criteria are relatively sophisticated for technologies to assess, the trustworthiness of the contents are based on the available user-generated information, such as Likes and comments for a post, ratings for a video, number of Followers for an account and number of endorsements for a Linkedin profile. (Kietzman et al 2011, 247.)

The last cell, *Group*s represents the extent of communities and subcommunities formation on social media. There are two types of groups: the first type is lists of contacts which are categorised by an individual according to their relationships

(friends, co-workers and family, etc.); the second type bears similar characteristics to offline clubs which are open (anyone can join), closed (approval needed) and private (hidden or invitations only). Grouping allows users to have better filtering system, such as to which groups they share a specific information or content to. (Kietzman et al 2011, 247.)

The honeycomb by Kietzmann et al (2011) provides us with 7 different aspects that altogether build the social media ecology. In the original journal, authors introduced the honeycomb and the implications for consumer engagement plans of companies. In this research, the features of each functional block, especially the psychological aspects are focused as the foundation to comprehend influencer marketing and analyse the data collected.

As each platform has different portion of each functional block, analysing and mapping out the prominent component is always necessary to ensure success across several platforms. Campaigns running on Facebook and Instagram, for instance, should require different success goals, different planning and execution strategies as well as different algorithms for measurement.

2.2.2 The social media matrix

The matrix developed by Zhu and Chen (2015, 335-345) is a useful tool for analysing and comparing social media platforms based on two features: the nature of connections and the extent to which messages are customised. Figure 3 presents the matrix with 4 categorising elements: content-based vs. profile-based and customised message vs. broadcast message.
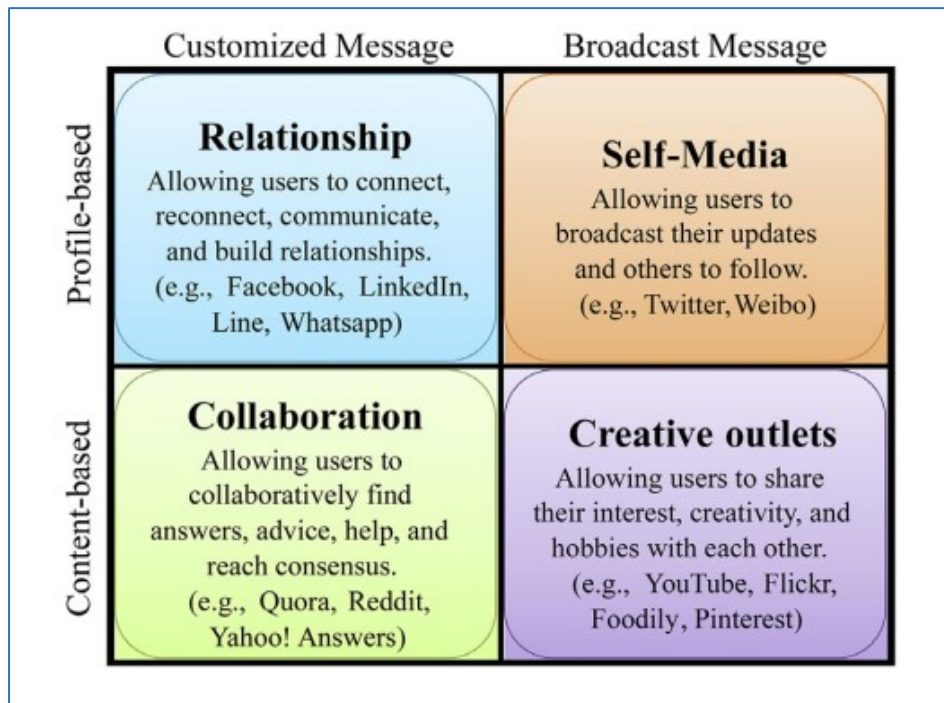
Figure 3 Social Media matrix by Zhu and Chen (2015)

There are two types of Connection established on social media: *content-based* vs. *profile-based*. Connections which focus on the users or the characters behind the social media accounts are profile-based (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn) whereas connections which take the contents published by the accounts as the focal interest are content-based (e.g. YouTube, Flickr)

Facebook is listed as p*rofile-based* and Instagram is c*ontent-based*. However, these platforms can belong to the two categories. Facebook pages which only focus on content such as entertaining videos, memes, articles and news etc. have followers who have no wish to establish to study and connect to the pages but only to receive the uploads and enrich their own newsfeeds. Instagram connections, on the other hand, can be built upon interests in the profiles rather than the contents. These connections are typically among users' real social networks (somebody they know in person). One chooses to follow another user to get updates from this person through images and videos and can initiate conversations in the Comment section or in Direct Message.

On uploading content on a social media, customisation occurs to get suitable messages across their target audience. The audience base ranges from one

person (a friend), a small group (colleagues, friends from college), to mass audience (all followers, whoever can access one's profile or share interest).

The social media matrix is then developed with 4 divisions of social media services: r*elationship, self-media, collaboration and creative outlets*, which can be seen in Figure 3.

The *Relationship* block contains social media services which are profile-based and have customised messages. The connections are typically within users' social circles (from acquaintances to close friends) and both sides confirm the connection and wish to develop and maintain that relation by keeping each other updated about their lives and letting their circles understand them better by sharing opinions and contents that can showcase their interests, personalities and status. (Zhu and Chen 2015, 337 & 340.)

Social media platforms which focus on profile-based connections but consist of mainly broadcast messages belong to the *Self-Media* division. Common account owners are celebrities, brands, governments and organisations etc. with the intention to freely express their influential voice across social media platforms to their mass audience at minimal cost, unlike traditional, media-owned channels (e.g. TV, newspapers & magazines). Although the followers are interested in the profiles, they do not need to have any relation to those profile as a personal level, thus no obligation for two-way confirmations and interactions. (Zhu and Chen 2015, 337 & 341.)

Social media platforms which operate on *Collaborations* are communities of users who contribute customised contents to "user-demands". Quora and Yahoo! Answer, two popular examples in this division, consist of questions which are posted by users and answers which are also created by users. Users can either reply with their independent answers or sequential to the previous answers. Other Collaborations services are Reddit, 9gag and Igmur where registered users post links, images and photos as well as upload their comments regarding the contents and initiate discussions with other users. Users on such platforms

typically have no social ties on both virtual and real world, but relationships between users can be formed and developed if they, in one common scenario, stumble upon each other in a comment section and find out they share many mutual values, so they decide to contact each other and from there the connections are being built. (Zhu and Chen 2015, 338 & 342.)

The forth block – *Creative outlets* – represents platforms on which users broadcast their interests, hobbies and creativity. The contents can either be collected from other sources or self-made, about interests such as cooking, pets, fashion; hobbies such as travelling, playing football, doing DIY projects; and creativity such as singing, filming a short movie or a video blog (vlog) etc. The users scroll through the sites, click on contents that attract their attentions, follow accounts/channels with interesting uploads and exchange their comments. The Creative outlet services facilitate competence and self-actualisation in users as they can showcase their interesting characters and creativity to the world and seek recognition. These sites serve as entertainment and inspiration sources for users as well. (Zhu and Chen 2015, 337 & 343.)

Although the matrix is clearly developed, some social media platforms cannot be completely classified under one division. How each person makes use of social media is diverse, leading to the overlap of some features in the matrix. For instance, one person can have two accounts on Facebook at the same time, with one dedicated for his/her social circles, updating customised messages about his/her daily life and developments, and the other page for the mass audience, broadcasting about her creativity (e.g. tutorial and performance videos of playing flute). Therefore, one must take into consideration the nature of the profile before deciding which division the platform belongs to. Another important matter to be acknowledge is that the structures of social media are getting more complex and dynamic, ergo following the trends continuingly and being flexible are necessary to maintain one's fashionable state. One should consult at least 2 up-to-date models to ensure accuracy.

3   BRANDING

As influencer marketing revolves around influencing consumers with the use of eWOM, people-centric approach is focused to generate connections that consumers feel with brands (Talavera 2015). In order to understand how consumers evaluate brands, which aspects of a brand that can be evaluated shall be discussed first. Therefore, this chapter is introducing academic literature of consumer-focused branding: Keller's Brand Equity & Brand Resonance and Consumer Attitudes.

3.1   Keller's models

On building a strong brand, marketers are faced with challenges to build desired impressions (thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions, opinions, and experiences) of the brand from the product/service and the marketing programs (Keller 2013, 69). There are two approaches for brand building as developed by Keller (2013): Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) and the Brand Resonance model.

The foundation of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is in the consumers perceptions which are shaped by their interactions with brands (Keller 2013, 69). CBBE is defined by many scholars and some of the most widely used definitions are "customer-based brand equity is defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller 1993, 8) and also by Aaker (1991, 15) as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers". Keller's definition implies that there is a relationship between consumers' knowledge of the brand and how they react to the marketing mix. Positive CBBE benefits brands by making the marketing programs more efficient and effective, enabling larger margins and premium pricing, quality guarantee for a wide scale of products under the brand name (brand extension) (Keller 2013, 69). Aaker also claimed that CBBE leverages trade and creates competitive edge (1991, 39).

On the other hand, the Resonance model approach brand building step by step with the ultimate goal is to build active and intense loyalties in consumers (Keller 2013, 108). In the figure 4 below, the pyramid paradigm of Brand Resonance developed by Keller is illustrated with the definitions and the objectives of each stage in his brand development paradigm.
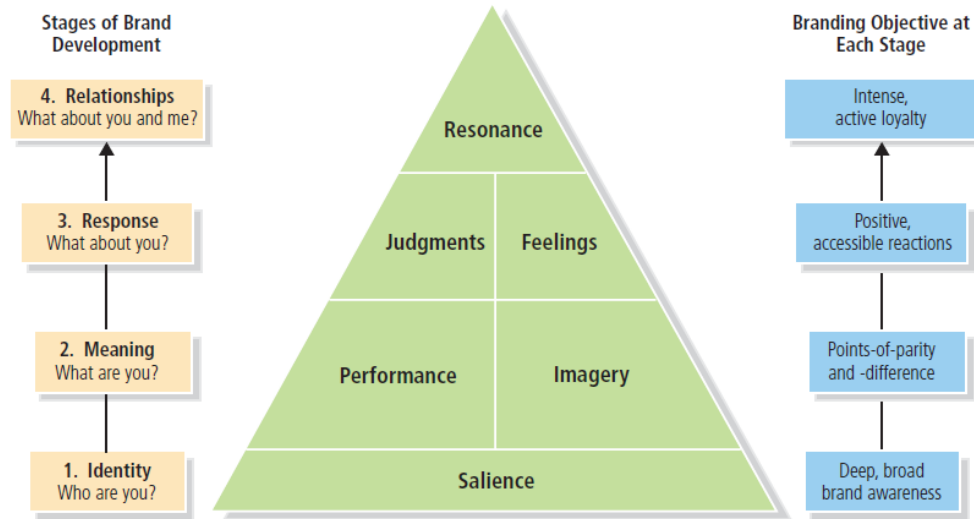
Figure 4 The Resonance Pyramid by Keller (2013, 108)

According to Keller (2013, 107-122), to achieve Resonance, brand identity must be established first. From the founding awareness, consumers start to acknowledge and distinguish the product performance (tangible) and how it fulfills consumers' psychological needs (intangible). Once consumers obtain the tangible and intangible associations with brands, they develop more profound comprehensions of the brands in terms of their own judgements (evaluation) and feelings (emotions), both of which are consumers' reponses to both tangible and intangible assets of brands. Finally, after the stages of getting to know the brand and deciding what to feel about it, consumers shall take things to the next level: Resonance. In this ultimate stage, the bonds are at peak since consumers feel a deep affinity and loyalty for brands and start to engage in activities such as repeat purchasing, endorsing and communicating with the consumer communities.

The two approaches – consumer-based brand equity and brand resonance – all take consumers as the core. While consumer-based brand equity is how positive and negative a consumer sees a brand, brand resonance is the meaning of a brand to a consumer. Consumers see a brand as a character and feel a sense of attachment and that mutual values are shared. Therefore, building strong relationships with consumers and motivating them to act and engage are the utmost importance in the brand resonance approach, which are also the intrinsic properties of influencer marketing. Influencers are part of a brand' marketing mix and reside in consumers' brand knowledge, ergo they are an asset of consumer-based brand equity. How influencers add values to brand equity and where they fit into the resonance model will be explored by this thesis.

3.2   Attitudes toward brands

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1967, attitudes toward a behavior together with subjective norms influence behavioral intention, which when combined with and perceived behavioral control leads to the actual behavior. In term of brand and consumer perceptions, the two scholars designed a multi-attribute model where "*attitudes* act as multiplicative function of the salient beliefs a consumer has about the product or service and the evaluative judgment of those beliefs" and the evaluation is considered the "core reaction" (Ajzen 2008, 527). *Brand attitudes* are "consumers' overall evaluation of a brand" as defined by Wilkie (1986, according to Keller 1993, 4). Therefore, positive brand or product attitudes generate a higher likelihood for positive consumer behaviors such as product purchasing and product endorsement.

Attitudes are formed from cognitive, affective/emotional and behavioral classes of information and each attitude can comprise of all 3 or only 1 component, as discussed by Fennis & Stroebe (2010, 110) and Jansson-Boyd (2010, 82). In the two works, the authors all argued that *cognitively based attitudes* are generally formed from facts and people's beliefs of the object whereas

Affectively (or emotionally) based attitudes are coming from feelings and the values on life people embrace. The third type - *behaviorally based attitudes* – is said to be generated by one's own preceding behaviors. Under some circumstances, one can only be clear about their attitudes after referring to their behaviors related to the object. Since a consumer's attitude is the evaluation of the product or the brand, it does not only originate from the user's experience in using the product alone but is rather influenced by many other factors such as the advertisement, the company's ethical reputation, the atmosphere and one's mood when encountering the product/brand etc. Some can be controlled by marketers and some depend on real-time events. Therefore, to minimise negative effects such uncontrollable forces might cause, brands can enhance the controllable influences to strengthen the positive attitude a consumer holds. According to Fennis and Stroebe (2010, 147), the stronger the attitude, the more stable and resistant to change it is. Moreover, attitudes are the psychological filter for Brand equity in the consumer minds, and such impact was found in a research by Schivinski & Dabrowski (2013, 10).

One of the many ways a brand can control a consumer attitude is via advertising and communicating with consumers. An attitude toward a product or a brand can also be affected by one's attitude toward the promoting influencer(s). Therefore, one of the most important step in planning a campaign using influencers is to choose the right influencers first. As the influencers images and lives are not under brands' control, one influencer for example, might take an action that conflicts with the consumers' values, hence possibly damage their attitudes toward the brand. On the other hand, a brand in the event of crisis can seek helps from influencers who are strongly trusted and adored by their followers, to recover and regain good reputation. Burberry managed to revive their "Luxury" status from being associated with crazy hooligans by refreshing their marketing strategies which, of course, included World famous celebrities endorsements (Kate Moss, Cara Delevinge & Emma Watson etc.) (Hollis 2016, 165).

To summarise, *attitudes* have been discussed as one of the elements that promote a behavior, in this case, a positive action related to a product/brand such

as purchase, affinity development or advocacy. The consumer decision making process is complex and impacted by many factors, thus attitudes toward the product/brand alone are not the main predictor. In this thesis, how Influencers impact on consumer attitudes toward brands are investigated.

3.3   Marketing and communication of brands on social media

Social media has revolutionised the marketing and communication world thanks to its web 2.0 nature. The power has shifted to the consumers, and as Gunelius (2010) described, letting them evolve from CONsumers into PROsumers. The PROsumers no longer receive advertising contents from brands passively but engage actively in creating, sharing, discussing and even critiquing brands' movements, and help create more consumers (Tuten 2008, 34, Tuten & Solomon 2015, 24). According to Tuten (2015, 24), Participation is the fifth P in the P's marketing mix. Consumer voices form a realm of brands' Word-of-Mouth advocacy on social media and the consumers themselves are reported to favor this realm for product info and reviews than traditional advertising sources (Rashtchy et al 2007 and Vollmer & Precourt 2008 cited in Mangold & Faulds 2009, 360; globalwebindex, 2017, Kelly 2016, 13-18; Schivinski & Dąbrowski 2013, 3).

Many terms have surfaced such as *media democracy, brand democratisation, crowdsourcing* and *citizen marketing* which reflects the undeniable powers of PROsumers. Brands' strategies have embraced this shift of power by incorporating approaches to build relationships with consumers on social media. Although Relationship marketing has been around the corner before the emerge of web 2.0, social media have brought this practice to a high level by being free (except for ads cost) and widely accessible, hence equal opportunities for business from small to big; comprising of many innovative tools and features to broadcast creative contents; having the strength of connecting numerous people and communities (Guo 2011, 137). All of which leverage diverse two-way communications and make social media a magnet pulling consumers closer to brands by shared mutual values and satisfying their social needs.

Brands, more or less, have no better choice if they decide to neglect the reality since communication about brands occur with or without brands' interference on social media. Therefore, being present on the platforms gives brands the opportunities to control these conversations by stimulating positive buzz and mitigate negative waves, especially in time of crisis, which altogether are parts of the new dimension of integrated marketing communication that social media gave birth to, or "a new hybrid element of the promotion mix" as defined by Mangold & Faulds (2009, 357).

On the prosperous social media, brands do not execute only one but a myriad of practices simultaneously (e.g. promotion & branding, customer service & relationship management, retailing & commerce and marketing research etc. (Tuten & Solomon 2015, 24)) to interact with consumers. Ergo, it demonstrates the fact that *integrated marketing communication* (IMC) or marcom strategies, which employ various activities in the promotion mix such as advertising, direct marketing, public relations (PR), personal selling, sales promotion and interactive marketing (Smith et al 2006, 564-579, Boone & Kurtz 2007, 488), is vital for brands to create profound influences on consumers and strengthen the bonds with them.

In this social media promotion mix, the two ultimate objectives are 1) to enhance and spread the brand's media coverage (paid, owned & earned) so as to distribute the brand message and 2) influence consumer behaviors throughout stages in the purchase process (Tuten & Solomon 2015; Mangold & Faulds 2009, 358). The second objective is further elaborated by the authors as followed: *Brand awareness* is enhanced by brands" active presence and engagement on social media; *Desire* is provoked similarly to how advertising, catalog marketing and feature events work; Consumers are encouraged for *Product Trial*, and sampling is also facilitated by social media. Izzi Vietnam (Body Mist for Teens) ran a campaign on Facebook with a series of mini games and the prizes were free body mist bottles delivered directly to the winners' addresses. *Sales* are boosted as consumers follow brands on social media for information on incentives such as coupon, discount codes and offers;

Brand loyalty is reinforced thanks to strengthened relationships between brands and consumers. The positive association between social media integrated marketing communication and brand loyalty has been proven by many researches (Erdogmus & Cicek 2012, 1358; Schivinski & Dąbrowski 2013, 14), making Brand Loyalty a critical indicator for a successful IMC strategy.

However, since social media comprises of strongly interconnected communities, contents can be passed on rapidly like a virus, becoming viral. While being viral can benefit the brands substantially, this element can be a deadly weapon used against brands if the viral content is negative. One example is the recent crisis of United Airlines when they let airport securities violently beat and drag one customer out of their overbooked flight to give the seat to their crew members (reported by Zdanowicz & Grinberg 2017). If this incident had happened 15 years ago, the news would have only made it to the newspapers or TV at its best. It was because it was not a social media era yet and camera phones were not common either in the old days. However, since information can be shared and spread widely over social platforms nowadays, the clip spread rampantly and was picked up by a lot of media, raising outrage around the world, boycotting the brand, jeopardising its stock value and most of all, damaging the brand image. A penny has two sides. Powerful as social platforms are, the negative and destructive effect can be just as massive. Therefore, brands should always on the lookout and have a protocol to handle crisis immediately. Poorly or late managed crises are undoubtedly damaging nowadays since people expects immediate and customer-first actions from brands (Killian et al, 2015).

4 INFLUENCER MARKETING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Influencer marketing is a type of marketing where popular individuals that have a certain influence on people are paid by brands to promote for their products/services or to maintain the conversations about brands on social media. This is a broad term covering a wide area of marketing channels, ranging from TV, magazines, events, blogs to social media. Social media influencers, hence, are social media accounts from whoever can be (a singer, an actor, a blogger, a journalist or even a fictional character) that have influential voices to a certain

audience base (niche audience). These kinds of posts can be seen easily when scrolling on the newsfeed page. One popular example is Fit Tea promotion campaigns using top famous US female celebrities including The Kardashian sisters and other fit girls with high social media interactions, to pose pretty pictures with the product, in this case is a bag of tea, with captions including the hashtag #fittea.

4.1   Influencers – Who are they?

Influencers are generally people who have influence on other people and they are often considered as Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs). Influencers are usually famous people and indeed, "Celebrity Endorsement" is also the first form of influencer marketing (Hootsuite, 2017). Brand ambassador is another common form of influencers. Ambassadors are long-term influencers who are generally hired as spokespeople and representatives for brands (Sussman 2015). Therefore, ambassadors have higher level of engagement and commitment, and always show consistent images advocating for the brands.

Now, becoming famous has become much easier, especially when we have "internet famous personalities" who are famous and have influence over their followers of thousand or even million on the internet (vlogger, fashionista, blogger and celebrities etc.). This thesis discusses two models of Influencer classification by Ogilvy (2017) and Edelman (2017a).

Figure 5 demonstrates the pyramid of Influencers by Ogilvy (2017) that consists of 3 tiers:

- Tier 1 Traditional Mass Awareness: Celebrities, media etc.
- Tier 2 Digital and Micro Influences: Facebook creators, Youtubers, Bloggers, Instagrammers etc.
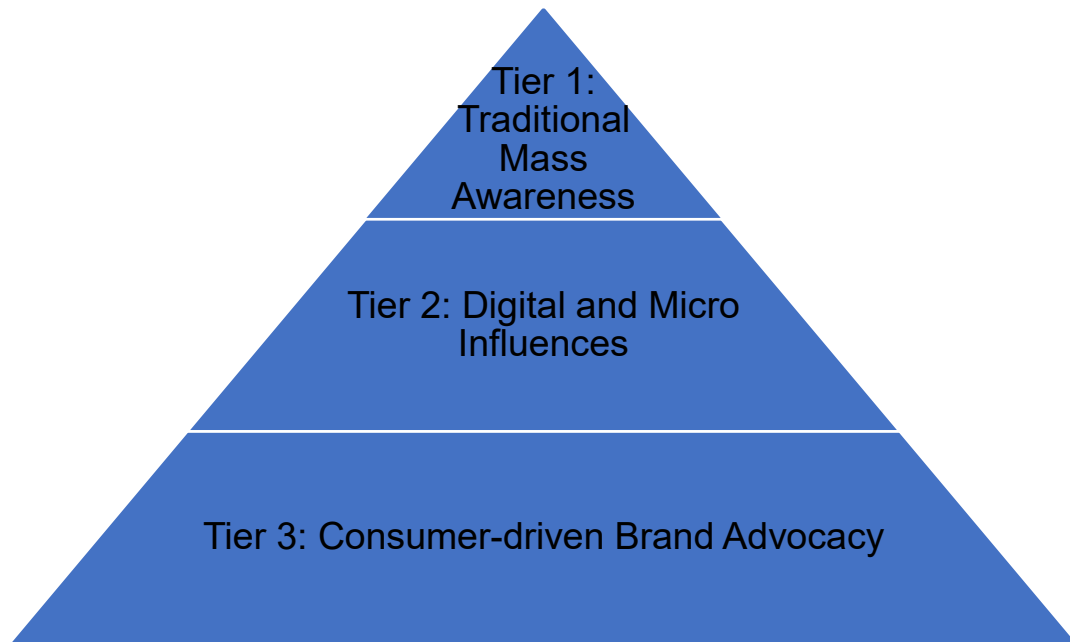- Tier 3 Consumer-driven Brand Advocacy: Brand fans, consumer advocates

Figure 5 Influencer Pyramid by Ogilvy (2017)

Edelman Digital Trends 2017 report also discusses the two main types of Influencers: Mass vs. Micro influencers. The first group is Mass influencers comprising of celebrities & internet personalities that have up to several million followers on social media. These internet personalities attract the same amount of public attentions as celebrities on social media thanks to their huge fan base. Felix Kjellberg aka Pewdiepie is an example as an internet famous comedian that has an enormous impact on his viewers and the public by being the most subscribed Youtube channel owner (57.5 million sub, October 2017). Felix has the capability to cause outrages and controversies on a large scale, which can be clearly seen from the incident in early 2017 when a video of him was uploaded with sensitive content about "anti-Semitic". The famous Wall Street Journal immediately criticised Felix, business partners such as Disney and Youtube terminated ties with him and thousand other tabloids covered this scandal, stating that it could be the end for Pewdiepie (Gillbert 2017 & Newcomb 2017).

Micro influencers, on the other hand, who are mostly internet personalities and have follower bases of around 1,000-100,000 people (Edelman 2017a, 18). While Mass influencers can reach to a much larger amount of audiences thanks to their massive fames and public interest attraction, it is the Micro influencers who are regarded as the more engaging and more influential to their communities by both

Ogilvy and Edelman, as Edelman (2017a, 19) explained: "Micro-influencers' "engaged audiences" tend to act with more passion because they feel more connected to the influencer and their content".

Consumer advocacy is considered the long-term influence, coming from engaging the fans who already have some relationships with the brands and are maybe real-life ambassadors, as explained by Ogilvy webinar (2017). They are the largest audience but ironically tend to be forgotten according to Spike Jones (2015) – former Edelman principal. In nutshell, engaging the brand fans – who have real connections and passions in the brands – is beneficial in the long run as it will strengthen the bonds and loyalty of these brand advocates and in return, they will create more profound influences on their online and offline social circles (family, friends, colleagues etc.).

Consistence can be seen from the two classifications although Ogilvy's categorises Influencers based on their functions whereas Edelman uses the number of followers. Therefore, an influencer can be classified differently in each case. For example, there are celebrities whose social media accounts have fewer than 100,000 followers, making them Micros according to Edelman. However, they can still attract media publication and appear on mainstream channels being celebrities, which qualifies for the Mass Influencer group in Ogilvy model. Nevertheless, should brands wish to choose the right influencers, aspects other than followers and their titles should also be evaluated, such as their contexts and engagement statistics (Hootsuite 2017).

4.2   Influencer marketing is the e-Word of Mouth

In the world of marketing, WOM – Word-of-mouth is the all-time most influential form (Phillips et al 2013, 26 & Talavera 2015). WOM spans to online relationships and human communications in web 2.0 era. Reviews and recommendations not only come from talking to friends/family etc. directly but also from the internet, via social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, consequently creating a new term: e-Word-of-Mouth. One of these online sources is Influencers. Social media influencers are the ideal channels via which brands

can communicate with consumers as influencers convey their own reviews and recommendations. Influencers promote brands via text posts, photos, videos and live stream videos; the messages can be direct or subtle; with/without the brand's name. The format is diverse and is getting more creative & sophisticated as social media platforms themselves are introducing new features constantly. The messages delivered by influencers are often authentic since they carry these influencers' characters and personal touch, which are the reasons why people follow these influencers from the beginning.

4.3   The state of influencer marketing

In Asian Pacific region, 78% of the brands surveyed in "The Rise of Influencers" report by Econsultancy claimed they were already or planning in the next 12 months to execute influencer campaigns in their marketing strategy (Econsultancy, 2016). Influencer industry is currently developing very fast in Asia and there is an award dedicated to Influencers in many segments such as YouTube Channel, Fashion, Lifestyle, Healthy & Fitness and Food etc. named Influence Asia, organised by GushCloud Pte. Ltd.

Many statistics show how effective influencer marketing campaigns are. For examples, in terms of Return on Investment (ROI) compared to traditional marketing methods, influencer marketing can be up to 11 times generating more annual sales than traditional digital advertising (Tapinfluence, 2016, 44). In a Twitter survey conducted in 2016, 49% of the respondents use recommendations from influencers to make purchase decision and 20% were inspired to post their own recommendations. According to agencies Kissmetrics (2013) and Hootsuite (2017) blogs about influencer marketing, more targeted consumers can be reached if correct influencers are selected since each influencer has different follower base and their followers share some common characteristics and interests, for example if they are following a Personal Trainer, they are into Fitness and want to see how this personal trainer eats and trains and learn tips to stay healthy, so it is easy to promote a product, e.g. protein powder through this influencer to persuade the followers to purchase the product since it is a recommendation coming from someone they trust. Besides, influencer marketing

is perfect in today's setting where consumers lose trust and show hatred toward traditional and forced advertising (Talavera, 2015,), where AdBlock usage is rising robustly - 30% growth from 2015 to 2016, accounting for 11% of total world devices (PageFair, 2017, 4). Moreover, influencer marketing is native advertising, which does not disrupt user experiences, hence has little negative effects yet draw more attention as compared to other forms (traditional and digital display ads) (Talavera 2015; Moruzzi 2017, 6; Greenberg, 2011 & Bakshi 2015, 4-15).

Figures 6, 7 and 8 are examples of Influencers' posts featuring a product or a brand on the top 3 social media sites. In Figure 5 and 6, the influencers take advantage of the hashtag feature to mention the brand names. However, there is a difference in their contents. In figure 5, Lan Ngoc does not just simply mention the brand as Amanda in figure 6 does but she also introduces the key features of Note8, with the hashtags #livefocus, #Note8, #xóaphôngchủđộng (*proactive background blurring* in english) and #Samsung. The use of hashtag is intrinsic to influencer marketing as it not only allows social media users to recognise the brands but also enables them to explore what other people (including other influencers or the other posts of the current influencer) are talking about related to the hashtag. Therefore, brands use unique hashtags for each of their campaigns so that consumers can discover more about the campaigns from other influencers and from fellow consumers. The buzz on social media about brand marketing campaigns can be checked using hashtags. Figure 9 demonstrates the hashtag feature with an example of the hashtag #xóaphôngchủđộng of Samsung's Note 8 campaign.
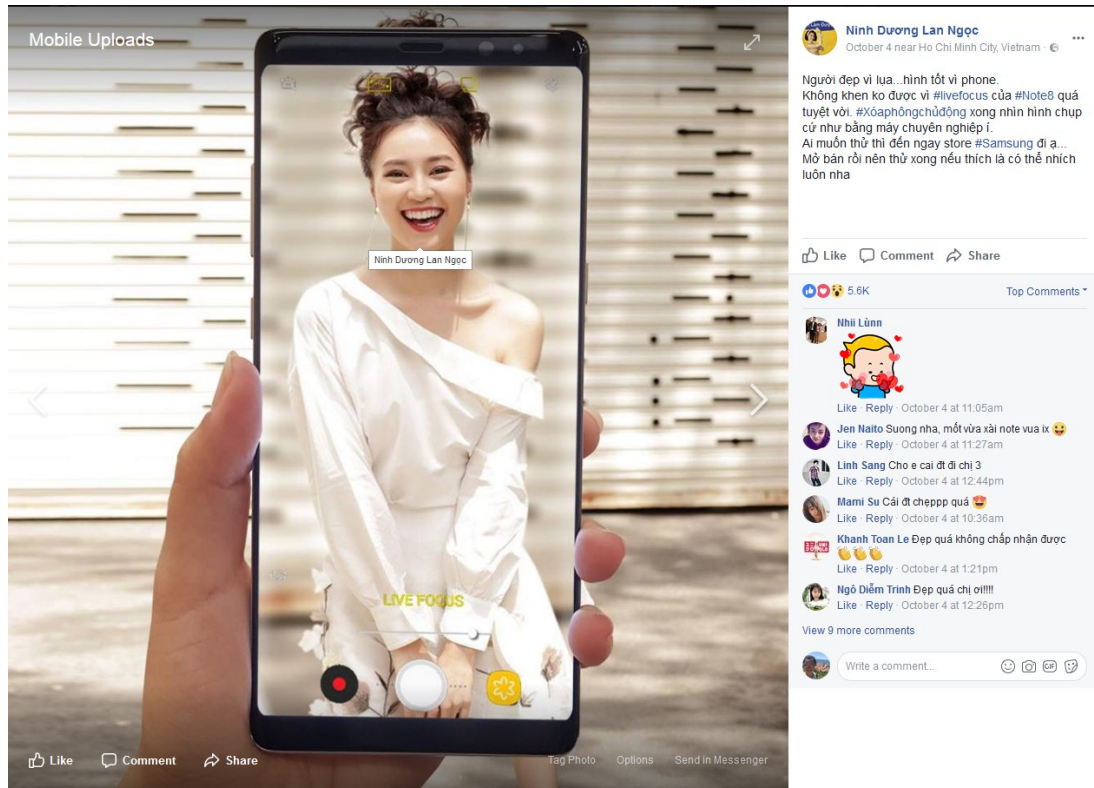
Figure 6 Vietnamese Actress Lan Ngoc promoting Samsung Note 8 - Facebook

Figure 7 Australian Fitness Trainer Amanda Bisk promoting for H&M - Instagram

Figure 8 Finnish Youtuber Hermanni in a Karl Fazer Travel campaign 2017 – Youtube
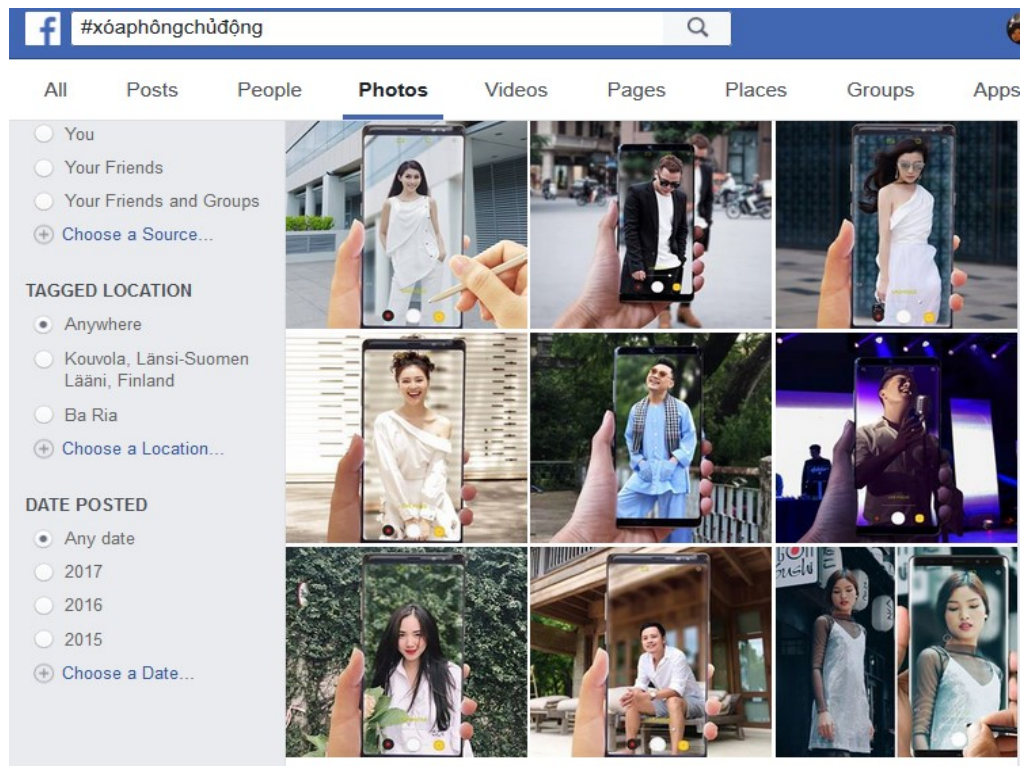

Figure 9 Photos with hashtag #XóaPhôngChủĐộng

4.4   The psychology of the followers

In the middle of a trust crisis, whom do we trust?

Edelman, one of the largest PR firms in the world, published their Trust Barometer report 2017. The study was carried out in 28 countries with more than 33,000 participants. They have marked 2017 with "Trust Crisis" with declines in all four institutions: governments, NGOs, business and media. The percentages of trust in all 4 groups are below 55%, and the poorest institution, unsurprisingly, is the governments with only 41% of the surveyed trust them. With media, they lose 5 points compared to last year result, standing at 43%, which is the biggest fall among all the 4 groups. The report compared Trust Index between the Informed Public (well-educated, following media and business news regularly, representing 13% of total global population) and the Mass population (87% of global population). Results show that distrust in Mass Population is more severe than in the Informed Public with 15 points different – a 3-point increase as compared to the result in 2016. Representing 87% of the total global population, the Mass Population inarguably is the vital consumer base in the market. From the big picture, people are having skeptical views toward the world. This crisis is affecting communication strategies, requiring a more people-centric approach to be adopted: listening to and studying the target audience, addressing people's concerns, etc. (Harrington 2017).

In terms of marketing, trust has shifted to social media contents as a study by Olapic (2016, 4) revealed that social users believed in social media generated contents 7 times more than traditional ads. The 2017 Trust Barometer reports that 62% respondents trust companies' social media whereas 38% trust advertising. And social media is perceived as the more trust-worthy source of information for products and services among other traditional channels with corporate-sponsored contents (Foux, 2006, 38). A study conducted by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2013) also found that User-generated brand contents have more positive impacts on consumer overall perceptions of brands than firm-generated contents.

The study of Edelman also reveals that we would trust "somebody like ourselves" the most, together with Technical and Academic experts. 51% of the respondents reported to trust "personal experiences" and 49% trust "data". Findings in The Trust Barometer are consistent with the Global Trust in Advertising report by Nielsen (2015, 10): The most credible source is "Recommendations from Someone I Know" (78-88% completely or somewhat trust) across the surveyed regions (Asia-Pacific, Europe, America and Africa/Middle East). "Consumer Opinions Posted Online" is another trust-worthy WOM source that has high ranking. However, "Ads on Social Networks" is not considered as a highly credible source with low scores (32-57%) across regions.

Why do people follow and trust influencers?

In which aspects do influencers fit in the descriptions: "someone like ourselves" & "someone I know"? Let's trace back to the matrix of Zhu & Chen (2015). Influencer marketing belongs to the Self-media division with two features: the accounts are profiled-based, and the messages are broadcast to their followers.

The audience somewhat appreciate voices and opinions of the influencers they follow. On the other hand, upon consuming self-presentation contents from influencers, their needs of Relatedness (the yearning for contact and caring from other people, especially loved ones), Self-actualisation (the state of fulfilling one's purpose in life, deeper understanding of the world and living one's full potential) and particularly Self-Esteem (a sense of worthiness and self-competence (Mruk 2006, 20)) are being satisfied. Based on the honeycomb of social media functions by Kietzmann et al (2011): Liking, Comment and Sharing on a post is an act of Self-presentation as one wish to show people in their own circle of networks his/her personality and inner self. Influencers disclose their personalities on social media, thus followers can feel a sense of closeness and connectedness. Therefore, followers subconsciously grow to see these people as "someone they know". On the other hand, interacting with a content from an influential person is also a way for social users to showcase their characters & identities. Moreover,

as more is being spoken on social media, social users can easily discover people who share values that are similar or inspirational. Knowing that other people also embrace their values help them confirm their beliefs & self-esteem. In addition, self-actualisation is also achieved when one knows his/her values in life are appreciated by an influential person and by the other followers, as well as when his/her standing in life can be reflected. In this case, the KOL is *"someone like ourselves"* and *"someone I know"*.

Besides, copying the influencers' styles, e.g. owning the same bag, one wishes to show a connection with them as well as to show one's status and class, that one has similar taste with this famous person or can afford the same brand. The behaviors can contribute toward boosting one's self-esteem (Zhu and Chen 2015, 341).

4.5 Assessment criteria of an influencer marketing campaign

To measure the performance and effectiveness of an influencer marketing strategy, many agencies have developed their own metrics and systems to track, monitor and analyze. However, there is no standardised metrics yet, which is challenging marketers (Ellis 2017). This thesis will introduce the common Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) across many measurement methods. The information is collected and combined from 3 sources: Ogilvy webinar recap (2017), Younet Media blog (2017) and Influencer Marketing Hub ebook (2017).

Quantitative Methods to measure effectiveness of an influencer marketing campaign:

- **Reach & Impression**: The number of social users see the influencer' post is Reach. However, the Impression statistic is more precise to measure the actual number of people who read the post. (Ogilvy 2017, 44; Younet Media 2017; Influencer Marketing hub 2017.)

- **Engagement**: The amount of like + share + comment a post receives. The Engagement statistic can have many implications, for instance: how popular an influencer is, how much attentions this person attracts and how appealing the post is to social users etc. (Ogilvy 2017, 44; Younet Media 2017; Influencer Marketing hub 2017.)

- **Conversion:** an extent to which consumers take actions upon reading the branded influencer's post. An action can be provoked by a Call-to-Action post. There are several data types to measure Conversion Rate: Brand Mentions, Influencer Mentions, the increase of Followers of the brand fanpage, Traffic to landing page (Click-through rate), Store visit, Registration via a form, Coupon usage, Sales etc. (Ogilvy 2017, 44; Younet Media 2017; Influencer Marketing hub 2017.)

Qualitative Method referring to measurements which require extra investments into scanning through the reactions of social users are:

- **Buzz Relevance**: In the reactions from social users from comments, shares, brand and influencer mentions etc., not all of them concentrate or even relate to the brand messages at all. Therefore, analysts should scan through the conversations in order to see to which extent the influencer and the content have managed to draw attention and engage fans. A sample measurement formula is Average brand placement ratio = Total Brand mentions / Total comments in an influencer's branded post. (Younet Media 2017)

- **Sentiments**: Sentiments among social users about a post can be deduced from the tone of their reactions (Neutral, Positive and Negative). The sentiment element is critical to see whether the content and the influencer is influencing consumers in a desired way, compare and analyze to find out which influencer and which content style is more effective and allow brands to adjust accordingly. However, due to its nature of intangibility, calculating ROI is more difficult with Sentiments. (Younet Media 2017, Influencer Marketing hub 2017.)

Each brand has different goals when executing a campaign, e.g. increase brand awareness, boost sales or introduce a new product or service. Therefore, each campaign will adapt different measurement method that fits best with the goal and also can point out campaigns and influencers' shortcomings, potentials for development and key-learnings.

Analysing buzz and sentiments are the closet approaches to capture the impacts of influencer marketing on consumer perceptions of brands. Apart from being time-consuming and demanding, these statistics are covering many aspects which analysts can overlook from numerical data: Clicking Like for the hairstyle whereas the advertised product is a bicycle, commenting about the lipstick the influencer is using while she is promoting for a handbag, accidental clicking on a

Call-to-action link, and receiving high interaction statistics but the majority are triggered by an incident (e.g. a scandal).

4.6 Influencers on consumer journey

To reinforce the discussion of how influencers work on consumer buying process, the process itself will be elaborated first. Although the process of buying decision is complex and under many influences (Jansson-Boyd 2010, 145), marketers have always tried to study consumer behavior to reach and direct consumers toward brands effectively. In general, consumers would go from the phase of need surfacing, to doing product research and final purchase, and finally to evaluation phase. The process comprises a series of 4 phases: Need, Learn, Buy and Value (Davis & Gschwandtner 2011, 24), or a journey a consumer takes, according to Court et al (2009) – McKinsey leaders. According to Court et al (2009), marketing is about reaching consumers at the most influential moments, especially during the consumer journey which is depicted by Court et al (2009) in Figure 10:
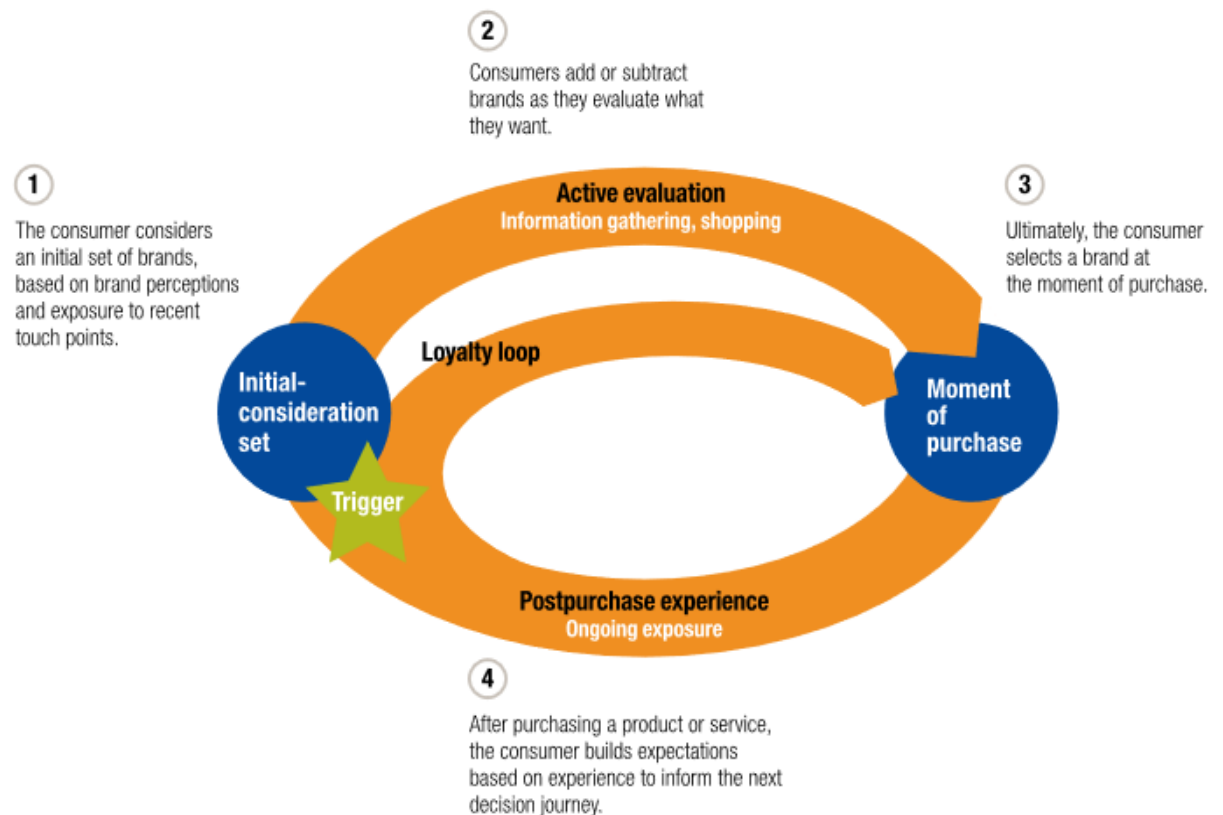

Figure 10 Consumer Buying Decision Process (Court et al 2009)

Within this circle, interactions between brands and consumers (touchpoints) can be made in any phrase with the first 3 stages (Considering initial sets of Brands; Evaluating options via information research & Moment of Purchase) focus on guiding consumers to their final decisions and the last stage – The Ultimate Moment of Truth (Solis 2014) – focuses on engaging with consumers sharing their experiences and feedbacks (WOM messages). Besides, in Stage 4, if Loyalty is generated, the journey will become a loop, skipping the Active Evaluation and jumping straight to Repeated Purchase. Another implication for the loop is that a consumer' postpurchase review drives other consumers toward their Moment of Purchase, which is the new pull for the purchase decision, replacing the old-time force - company-driven marketing. (Court et al 2009.)

In influencer marketing, influencers are one of the touchpoints that drive consumers throughout their journeys. Brand awareness is generated from KOLs' contents, thus consumers can recall the brands when the need of purchase arises. As consumers search for product information, they can come across influencer contents, hear directly from other people who are influenced by the brands' influencers or read online reviews from other people who previously bought the products thanks to the influencer advocacy. The influencer contents can be a product introduction and review, coupon-code promotion or a part of the brand's PR campaign. Each type of content has different effects on consumers, such as a review will confirm the product quality, a promo-code creates money-saving incentive and a PR content can help stimulate positive feelings and fondness of brands in consumers. Experiences during and after buying and using the product, whether good or bad, will be shared as WOM messages via various channels (real life conversations, online review platforms, social media etc.) If the experiences are favorable, brand loyalty can be formed in consumers and the trustworthiness of the influencers is reinforced, making them credible sources for consumers' next purchase journeys. Influencer contents can also be platforms for consumers to express their opinions and reviews about the products and brands. In this case, one consumer upon reading a branded post can also be influenced

by the commenters. Judging from this, in influencer marketing realm, brands are collaboratively created by the three parties: brands, influencers and consumers.

5 DIGITAL LANDSCAPE IN VIETNAM

According to We are Social & Hootsuite (2017b, 166), Vietnam has approximately 94.93 million people and 53% of whom have access to Internet. 46 million Vietnamese, which accounts for 48% of the total population, own at least one social media account. Further key figures related to the internet consumption in Vietnam can be found in Figure 11 and 12, such as the number of mobile active social users, the number of mobile subscriptions as well as the percentages of the above figures, which really shows that many Vietnamese love social media.
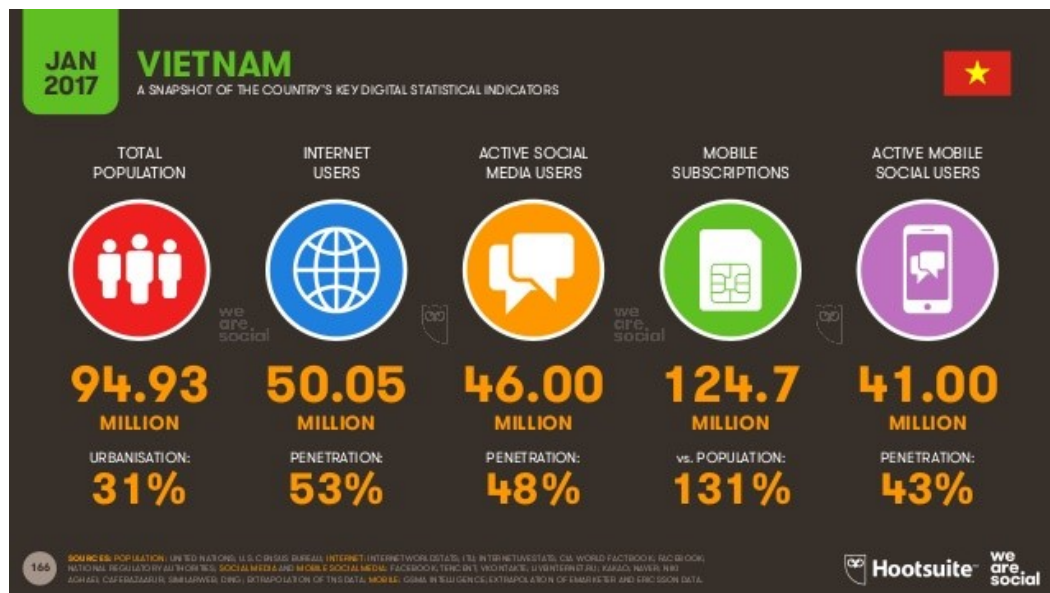
Figure 11 Vietnam Internet Usage Overview (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017b, 166)

eMarketer (2016, 4) cited a survey conducted by a Vietnamese Market research agency in 2015 showing that 80% of the respondents used Internet for online news websites and social network sites. In 2015, 32% of the Vietnamese internet users spent 5-7 hours online per day, which was among the highest in Southeast Asia (eMarketer 2016, 2). With such high exposure into social media, influences of online KOLs to Vietnamese netizens are undeniable. Such influences can also be found in the Social Media Usage research by DI-Marketing (2017), which discovered Celebrities are in the top 3 topics which draw the most attraction.

Figure 12 Vietnam Social Media Usage (We are Social & Hootsuite 2017b, 178)

Vietnam is also a country of heavy mobile phone users with the total subscriptions take up 131% of the total population and 43% of the total population are mobile social users, as illustrated in Figure 10 and 11. Thanks to the booming mobile phone industry, Digital advertising is also flourishing as predicted by the growing digital ad spending budget, especially mobile ad which is expected to double in Vietnam (Lee 2017). Judging from the statistics, a shift of marketers into the digital realm can be easily seen. However, traditional advertising is still taking the majority of budget pool (Rao 2017).

6   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1   Data collection

Mix-method is approached in this thesis featuring an online survey questionnaire and a series of interviews. Therefore, this thesis uses Triangulation data collection and this combination will generate more sophisticated data and reinforce the comprehension of the matter (Weathington et al 2012, 400). The reason for this choice due to the viewpoint that each methodology (quantitative or qualitative) has pros and cons and one is seemingly inadequate to obtain the desired outcome for this thesis. The problem of "generalisation" that a quantitative research can achieve is that one may react differently in different

context and there is no depth in the data collected. On the same note, a qualitative research cannot justify for the large population. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (cited by Weathington et al 2012, 409), that quantitative research and qualitative research are compatible and complementary is the directing philosophy for researchers who wish to use mixed-method and they will support the transferability of the validity of findings across time, sample and context.

This thesis gathers primary data through two sequential sources: an online survey questionnaire and interviews. Benefits of using a survey questionnaire are that they are simple, cost effective as well as the ease of the distribution to a large number of people. According to Saunders et al (2009, 362), questionnaires are often used for descriptive researches, where researchers use attitude, opinion or organisational practice-related questionnaires to describe a phenomenon with its variable attributes, or explanatory researches, where researchers study the relationships or correlations of variables. However, questionnaires are not the most ideal for researchers who wish to include many open questions in their data collection (Saunders et al 2009, 362). Interviews, on the other hand, allow researchers to engage interviewees in a higher level, to probe their interviewees into the phenomenon, and to add deep and insightful perspectives to the findings (Sechdava 2008, 168). It is said by Saldana at el (2014, 33) to be one of the most popular Qualitative research methods that can obtain interviewees' own words about their authentic perspectives and sentiments on personal experiences or the world. They are categorised by formality and structure into 3 main types of interviews: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured/in-depth interviews; and can be carried out either with one respondent or to many respondents at a time (Saunders et al 2009, 320-321). In this thesis, semi-structured interviews were adopted since they were partly structured with a set of questions and partly flexible as in the conversations with interviewees, if any interesting point came up, the interviewer could ask the interviewees to go into more details about it. While in survey questionnaires, it can be problematic when respondents skip answering some questions or they select answers such as None or Neutral, interviews can avoid such problems as in a person-to-person context, the

interviewers can always try to address such questions and it encourages respondents to investigate and come up with their answers.

The questionnaire survey was designed and run on webropolsurveys.com version 3.0, for Vietnamese social media users aged above 16 to draw a general conclusion on the impacts of social media influencer marketing and the consumer sentiments. An ideal sample size was set about 100-150 respondents across the country and Vietnamese overseas, hence the sampling design was partly simple random (meaning each member of the sampling population has the same probability to be the sample according to Weathington et al (2012, 162)) and partly snowball (as defined by Weathington et al that respondents find other people in a cohort for the survey (2012, 166)). The sampling tactics were to enhance the possibility for generalisation. The survey was for Vietnamese only who are exposed to Vietnamese-based contents on social media, the language of the research will be in Vietnamese. However, to avoid misinterpretation of homonyms or misunderstanding the contexts etc., there was also a parallel English translation. In order to ensure the ethics of this thesis, respondents were informed that the research was for academic purpose, not for commercial and their identities would remain anonymous.

Appendix 1 illustrates the English version. The survey was completed by 120 respondents, accomplishing the target sampling size of 100-150, within 9 days from 30 October 2017 to 7 November 2017. The survey was distributed online, mainly through connections on social networks. The questionnaire comprised a variety of question types, from multiple choice, Likert, Matrix and open question. The questionnaire was designed with 3 sections. The first section, A – Follow famous people on Social Media, was intended to warm up respondents and to generate the context. Section B – KOLs & Marketing on Social Media began with the explanation of the term Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and continued with questions to inquire respondents' opinions on the marketing practices done by Key Opinion Leaders and on brands. The last section was C – Influencer marketing and your perceptions which was about respondents' perceptions of the terms and their sentiments with this marketing practice.

Interviews were carried out in the Qualitative research scope after the
Quantitative research had been completed, taking the questionnaire results as a
foundation to corroborate, from 10 to 12 November 2017. As the nature of
interviews requires participants' willingness to talk and share, the strategy was
convenience sampling, meaning that the researchers approach people who are
convenience to find (Weathington et al 2012, 165). Therefore, 3 interviewees
were approached personally and participated at their own wishes, after the
survey results had been collected. Interviewees are Vietnamese social media
users and the respondents of the previous survey. Besides, media usage was
also taken into consideration when selecting interviewees to ensure data quality.
By doing that, the possibility to obtain data efficiently from the suitable people
who either shared the same interest; were possibly insightful enough; or were
willing to help and open up, was strengthened.

The interviews were flexible as the participants completed the surveys differently
and flexibility would create possibilities to explore the topics in various directions.
The interviews were conducted mostly on the internet, via video-calling and
emailing since they were not in the same physical location. Recording and writing
notes were applied, and the notes were double-checked by the interviewees at
the end. The calls were through Skype and Facebook call feature and lasted
around 30 minutes to 1 hour. Based on the results the quantitative part, several
topics were introduced into the interviews such as: what factors other than
influencers drive consumers to purchase (since up to 48.3% disagreed that they
viewed influencers as their main source of information before making any
decision), how influencers should improve (since some negative remarks were
collected) and their personal preferences. For ethical reasons, the purpose of the
study was communicated to the interviewees clearly and their consents for
disclosure of relevant data were asked beforehand.

6.2   Data analysis

In this thesis, two types of data were collected: Quantitative and Qualitative. The
difference between the two data shall be discussed first. According to Saunders

et al (2009, 414), Quantitative data refers to numerical or quantifying data, and can be analyzed by many strategies, from creating charts to show the frequencies, using statistics to compare and establish relationships, to more complex methods such as relationship modeling. Qualitative data, on the other hand, are non-numerical, not quantified and are rich and full of potentials for researchers to explore the subject in as real a manner as is possible and requires sophisticated process of analysis, either deductive or inductive-based (Saunders 2009, 482).

As the nature of the data collected in this thesis was a combination of the two types, the analysis process included triangulation methods. The quantitative data were collected and processed using webropolsurveys.com analyzing toolkit, adopting descriptive and central tendency mainly. Besides, due to the fact that the questionnaire also consisted of open-questions, qualitative analysis was also conducted to the collected data with grounded theory strategy, which is to identify and develop theories from the collected date (Weathington et al 2012, 415). Findings in the data collected from the survey was further examined by sequential interviews. The data was later analysed descriptively, through coding (discovering the meanings of "individual section" of data as defined by Saldaña (2011, 95)), constructing patterns and categorising into themes, with the ultimate purpose was to present different perspectives on each interviewed individual on influencer marketing, which in this case is the "social phenomenon".

7   THE RESULTS

7.1   Online survey results

7.1.1   Demographic of respondents

120 Vietnamese respondents who are social media users completed the survey successfully. Table 1 presents the demographics of the sampling.

	17-24	25-34	35-44	45-55	Over 55	Total
Male	15	10	3	1	0	29
	12.5 %	8.3 %	2.5 %	0.8 %	0	24.2 %
Female	61	22	6	2	0	91
	50.8 %	18.3 %	5.0 %	1.7 %	0	75.8 %
Total	76	32	9	3	0	120

Table 1. Summary of Respondents

It is prominent that the majority of respondents are females (75.8 percent) whereas males only account for a fourth of the sampling. Most of the respondents belong to the young generations, with 63.3 percent aged 17-24. There is no respondent aged under 16 or over 55. Furthermore, respondents from both genders in middle age (34-55) are only a minority in the total sampling. Therefore, it is extremely important to take into consideration the fact that the results, which are going to be analyzed in the following chapters mostly, represent the voices of young generations, specifically females.

Figure 13 reveals that 61 percent (79) of respondents have a certain knowledge of influencer marketing and 27 out of 79 informed respondents claim to have well-established understanding about this marketing practice.
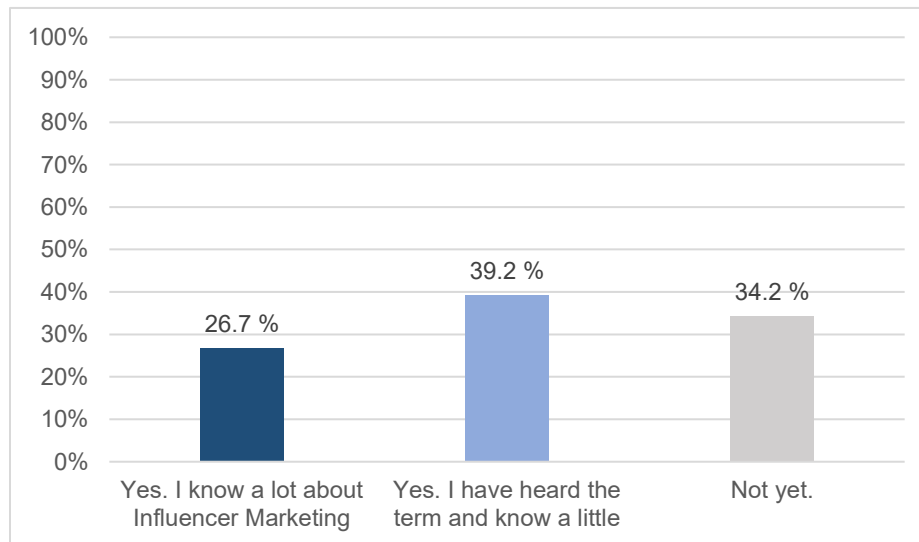

Figure 13 Knowledge of respondents about Influencer Marketing (n=120)

7.1.2 Social media behaviors of respondents

Regarding Famous people following activity, 21 percent of the respondents follow many famous people on social media, 22 percent reported to never follow or follow very few famous people and a majority of respondents (57 percent) reports to follow a moderate number of famous people.
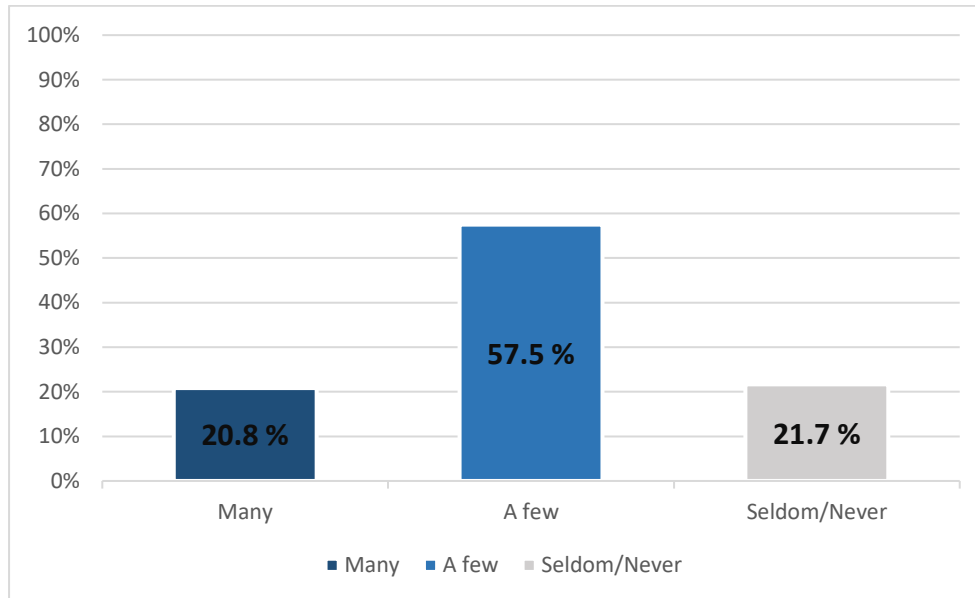

Figure 14 Famous People following behavior of sample (n=120)

Figure 14 illustrates the proportion of each response. Overall, famous people on social media are a common interest to follow to most Vietnamese social media users. Therefore, influences from famous people can be anticipated on Vietnamese social media. This result also confirms again that because in Vietnam, following famous people is such a mainstream activity that it enables influencer marketing to blossom and to become a popular marketing practice from big to small brands.

Among the three suggested social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, Facebook is favored by 86 out of 120 respondents as a channel to follow famous people. Instagram comes second with 68 respondents use it for this activity and finally only 48 respondents follow famous people on YouTube. However, YouTube is still a popular platform as judging from the statistic, 48 respondents account for 40 percent of the total sampling size. 3 respondents

suggest 3 different sites: weibo (Chinese social media site), behance (self-promotion platform) and official website. Judging from the result that is illustrated in Figure 15, Vietnamese are very active social media users, with one person can use several platforms and they show huge preference for Facebook.
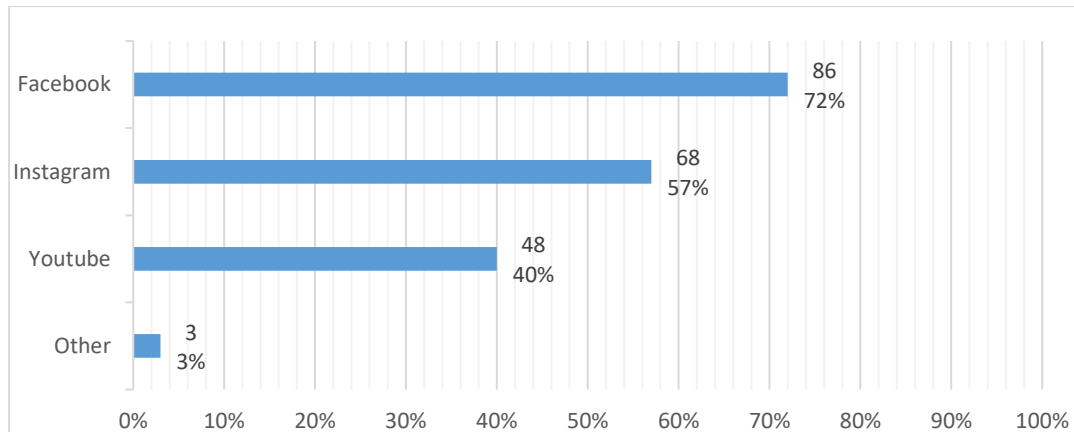

Figure 15 Platforms to Follow Famous People (n=120)

When scrolling through social media platforms, the majority of respondents (61 percent) report to be attracted by Photo-based posts, more than a fourth (27 percent) are attracted to posts containing Video. On the other hand, Text contents do not turn out to be appealing to respondents with only 10 percent of the total respondents choose Text, neither do Live-stream videos, chosen by only 2 respondents (1,6 percent), although Live-stream is a new digital trend and has been used to broadcast videos featuring influencers and products.

Upon seeing a post of a famous person, there are 4 possible interactions one can take: Read the content, press Like, write a Comment and Share the post. Figure 16 shows the frequency of each interaction responded by the survey participants. Respondents show more likelihood to Read (52 percent read contents often and very frequently) and press Like (41.32 percent Like often and very frequently) to the posts by famous people. Very few respondents reported to not read famous people's contents. However, Sharing and Commenting witnessed an opposite situation with half of the respondents claim to Never perform such interactions. Additionally, Sharing is a more performed action than Commenting.
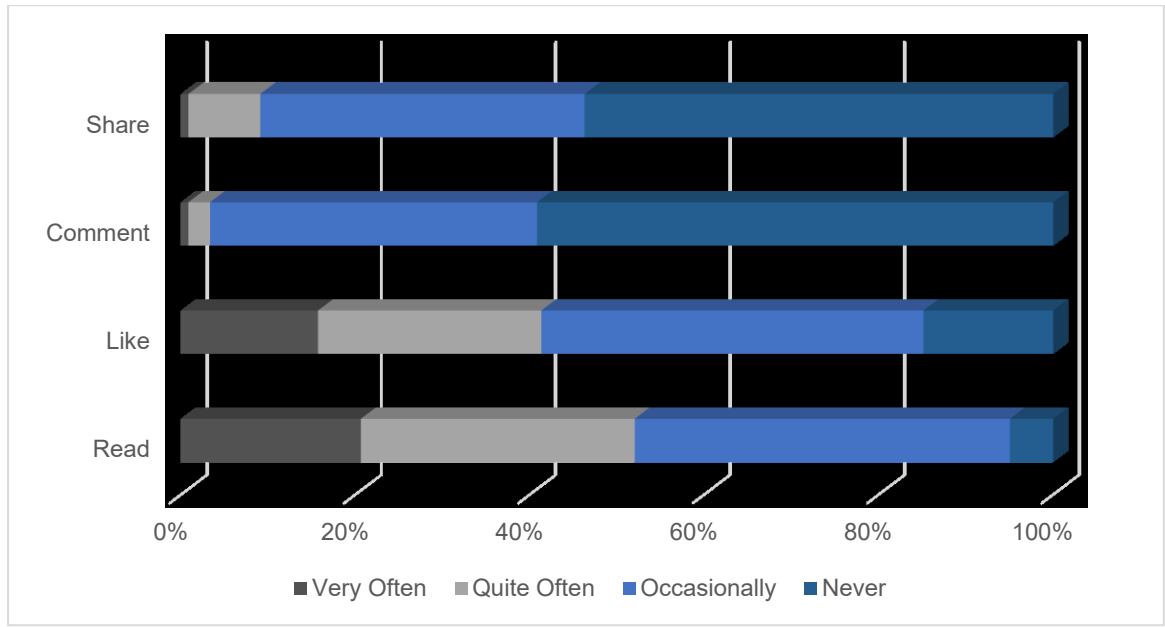
Figure 16 Frequencies of Social Media Interaction (n=120)

7.1.3 Following famous people on social media

With the question about which famous accounts that respondents follow the most, the majority of answers managed to mention at least one name. Apparently Vietnamese social media users follow those who work for show business (singers, actors and MCs) the most, internet personalities and famous people who often discuss social issues, philosophies, lifestyles and inspirational stories (for example vloggers and journalists). The result shows an influence from Korean and the Western show businesses on Vietnamese people as 10 percent and 20 percent of the responses mention names belonged to the two industries respectively.
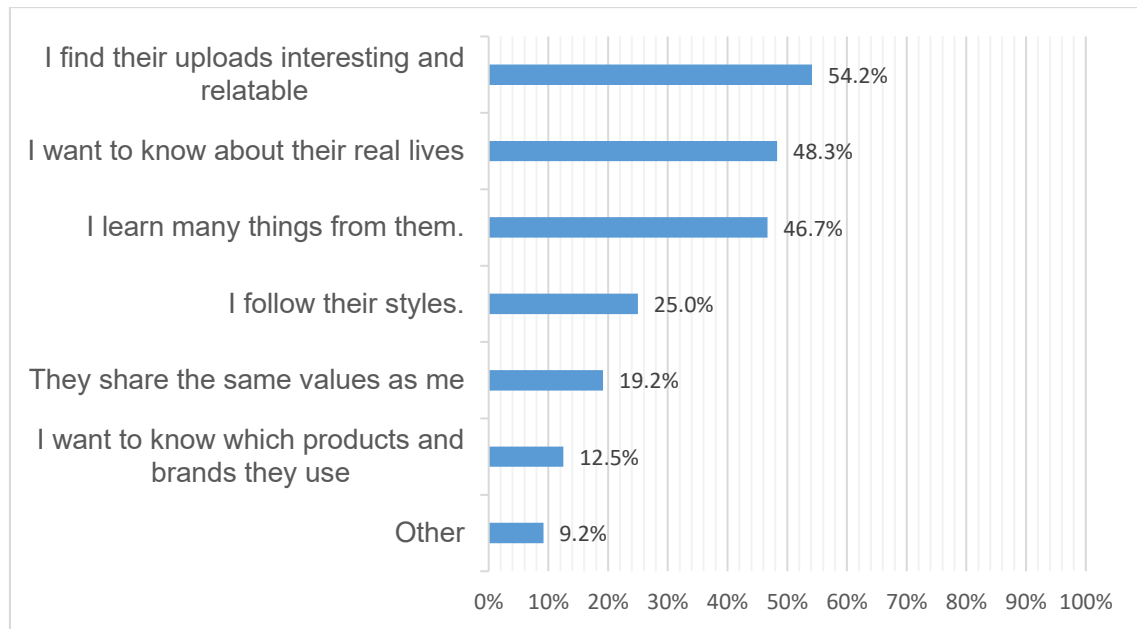
Figure 17 Motivations to follow famous people (n=120)

Figure 17 illustrates the reason why respondents follow famous people on social media. The most chosen reason (with 54 percent) is the contents posted by famous people which respondents find intriguing and which make them decide to follow the owner of these posts. Other popular reasons are to know about their real lives (48 percent) and that respondents learn many things from the famous people they follow (47 percent). A fourth of the survey participants think Styles are what they follow a famous person for.

A small number of respondents agree that they follow famous people for the mutual values shared and for the brands which famous people use. 11 respondents provide their personal answers in the Other option. Many responses are to follow their (famous people) works, projects and schedules for upcoming events. Other reasons are generally interpreted as entertaining values and good thoughts to learn from as well as reading different perspectives on current issues.

In an open question about how consumers feel if the products they are using are also used by their idols or favorite influencers, approximately 47% participants report having neutral feeling, leaving more than half of the total sampling size report to receive positive effects. These positive feelings can be categorised into 2 groups: a) happy & connected to idols and b) confidence & trust in the product.

One third of the respondents indicate feelings of happiness, joy, stylishness and connectedness to influencers whereas confidence in the quality of products can be found in a fourth of the respondents.

7.1.4 Impacts of influencer marketing

Figure 18 illustrates how rating on the Authenticity of Influencers when they endorse a product, meaning how honest and sincere they appear:
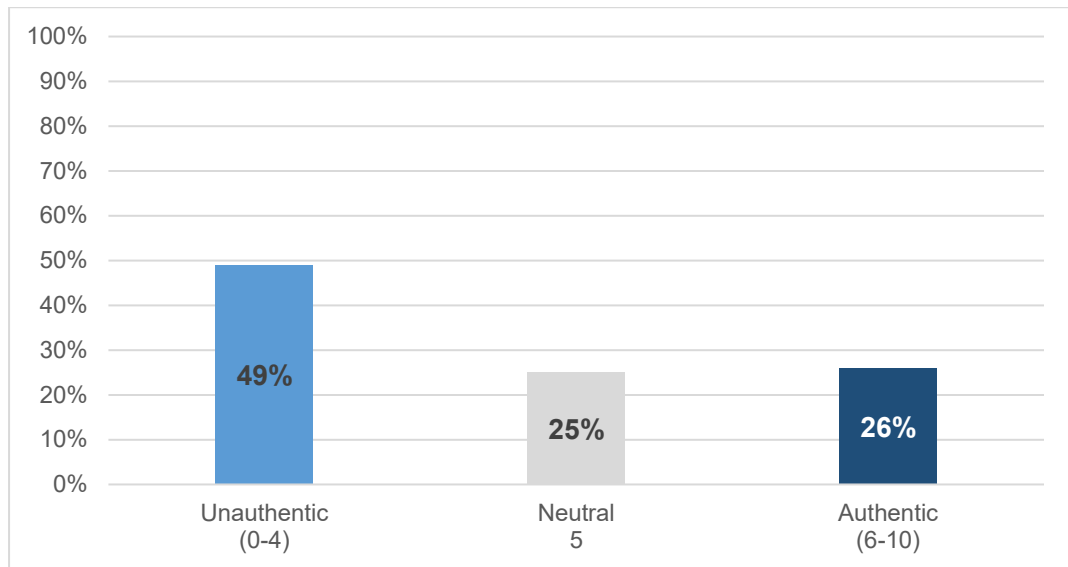

Figure 18 Respondents' evaluation of the Authenticity of Key Opinion Leaders

Overall, there are more consumers who show skeptical perspectives on how authentic influencer endorsements are on social media as 49 percent opted for low scores, meaning they do not think influencers are being genuine about the endorsements, and 26 percent still think influencers are authentic. To those respondents who rated more than 5, table 3 in the Appendix shows that respondents who chose average values (6 and 7) outnumber those who rated highly (8 to 10), meaning most of the audience tend to think influencers are only being moderately authentic.

Similar to the Authenticity, the trustworthiness of Key Opinion Leaders' posts about brands on social media according to the respondents was also measured and is presented in Figure 19. It is clear from the chart that besides having no

opinion, there are more respondents who report not to trust Key Opinion Leaders'
words about brands (26.7 percent) than those who trust (19.2 percent). This
result can be traced back to the rating of Authenticity, since consumers would
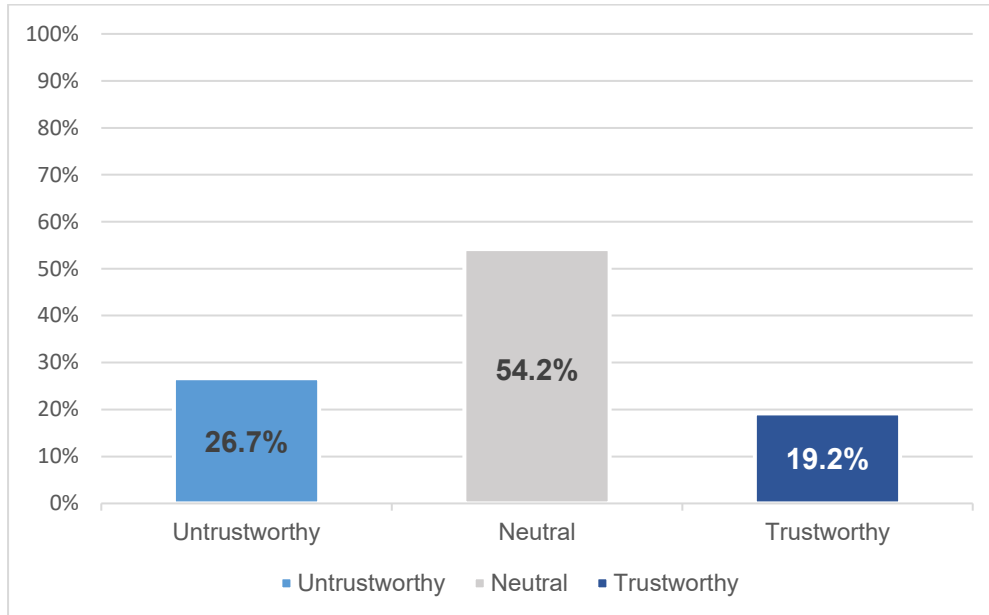hardly trust someone who they think is not being authentic in his/her content.

Figure 19 Trustworthiness of Influencers' posts on Social Media about brands

As influencer marketing is a popular marketing practice, there are many
influencers who are promoting for several brands at the same time. One question
was dedicated to finding out if these influencers were effective. As it turns out, a
majority of respondents (37 percent) claim they do not trust this influencer for
reasons such as: "this person is too commercial and not selective" (indicated by 5
respondents), "they are greedy for money" (2 respondents), "they (influencers)
are cheap" (1 respondent), and "they (influencers) cannot use all of those
products and rate them equally good" (1 respondent). A nearly equal number of
respondents (33 percent) have no opinion, leaving only 35 respondents out of
120 (20 percent) report to trust this influencer.

Figure 20 illustrates respondents' evaluation on 12 statements, which suggest the
influences of influencers on themselves. Consistent proportions (averagely 30
percent) of Neutrality are recorded in all statements. There is only one statement
(no.1) that received Agreement from more than 50 percent of sampling and two
statements with approximately half of the surveyed population disagreed with.

1) When I see a product, I remember the KOLs who promote for it — Agree 57.5 %, Neutral 26.7 %, Disagree 15.8 %

2) Seeing a KOL posts about a product makes me want to try it. — Agree 46.7 %, Neutral 28.3 %, Disagree 25.0 %

3) I like a brand more if a Key Opinion Leader (KOL) posts about it. — Agree 45.0 %, Neutral 35.0 %, Disagree 20.0 %

4) I trust a brand more if a KOL posts about it — Agree 44.2 %, Neutral 33.3 %, Disagree 22.5 %

5) I have made a purchase from a KOL's recommendations. — Agree 43.3 %, Neutral 27.5 %, Disagree 29.2 %

6) I find KOLs' recommendations are more convincing than the brand advertisements (TV, newspapers, social media fanpages) — Agree 35.0 %, Neutral 34.2 %, Disagree 30.8 %

7) The more famous the KOLs are, the more credible their recommendations appear to me — Agree 35.0 %, Neutral 27.5 %, Disagree 37.5 %

8) I will prefer buying brands which are endorsed by KOLs than other products — Agree 32.5 %, Neutral 32.5 %, Disagree 35.0 %

9) The more I like a KOL, the more likely I will buy the products she/he promotes for — Agree 32.5 %, Neutral 30.8 %, Disagree 36.7 %

10) I do not like a brand if it uses the people I hate to promote — Agree 27.5 %, Neutral 34.2 %, Disagree 38.3 %

11) I use KOL's recommendations as a main source of product info before making a purchase — Agree 26.7 %, Neutral 25.0 %, Disagree 48.3 %

12) I am willing to pay more to use the same brands as my idols — Agree 15.0 %, Neutral 24.2 %, Disagree 60.8 %
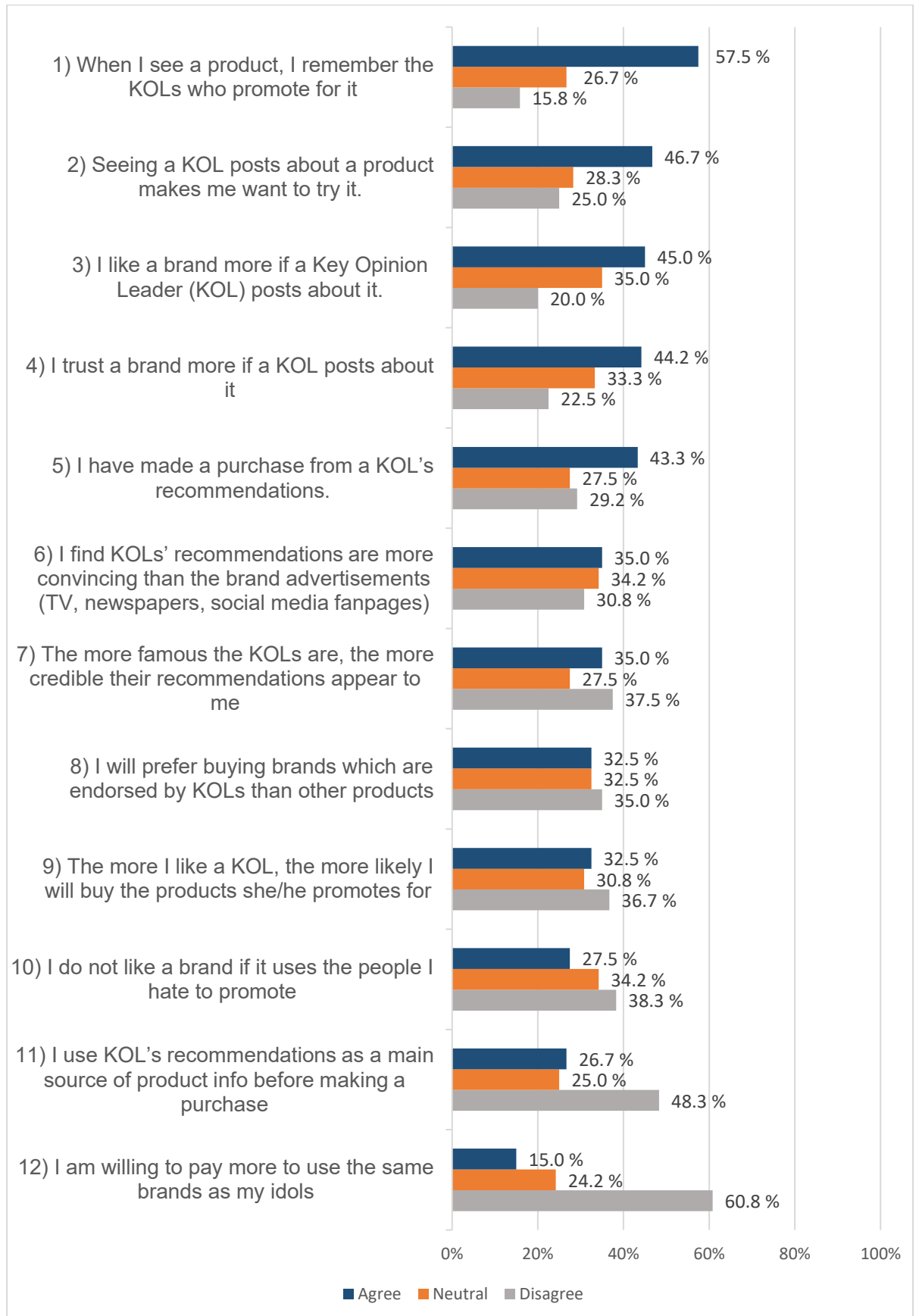
Agree Neutral Disagree

Figure 20 Consumers' sentiments for brands

As can be seen from figure 20, statements that receive major agreement proportions from the respondents are:

- When I see a product, I remember the Key Opinion Leaders who promote for it. (57 percent)
- Seeing a Key Opinion Leader posts about a product makes me want to try it. (47 percent)
- I like a brand more if a Key Opinion Leader posts about it. (45 percent)
- I trust a brand more if a Key Opinion Leader posts about it. (44 percent)
- I have made a purchase from a Key Opinion Leader's recommendation. (43 percent)

The most important key result is that consumers associate influencers to the brands they promote, making influencers part of consumer-based brand equity, or more specifically intangible assets of these brands. Besides, influencers can build Likeness and Trust for Brands in consumers and can trigger curiosity and interests in consumers to try out the products. Therefore, it is undeniable that Influencers create positive consumer attitudes as well as impacts on brand, specifically on Consumer-based Brand Equity and Salience in the Brand Resonance model. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that consumers generally do not develop negative attitudes toward brands if the brands use influencers they do not like (72 percent).

Brand-generated advertisements (on TV, newspapers, social media fan pages etc.) do not appear to be as credible as influencers' recommendations, as 35 percent report to agree, 30.8 percent choose to disagree and 34.2 percent remain neutral. Although this impact does not appeal to the majority of the respondents, it still shows there is a likelihood that consumers trust influencers more than brand-generated contents. Combined with the trustworthiness rating (presented on page 49), Vietnamese consumers still find influencers more credible than brand contents even though more consumers tend to distrust influencers than those who trust.

The popularity of influencers does not necessarily correlate with their credibility since there are relative equal proportions of Agree and Disagree to the statement: The more famous the KOLs are, the more credible their recommendations appear to me (35 percent). This result highlights that mass influencers do not always guarantee success and confirms the position and importance of Micro-influencers.

In Statement 8: I will prefer buying brands endorsed by KOLs than other products, 32.5 percent agree, 32.5 percent stay neutral and 35 percent disagree; and in statement 9: The more I like a KOL, the more likely I will buy the products she/he promotes for, 32.5 percent agree, 30.8 percent stay neutral and 36.7 percent disagree. The results show almost equal distributions among 3 values, creating an estimation that one in every three respondents had such impacts.

From influencers recommendations, 43 percent of the respondents reported to have purchased a product (or more), which shows that influencers can also contribute to sales as they drive consumers to take actions: go to store and buy and consumers are motivated by them to make the purchase. However, the respondents generally disagree (61 percent) to be willing to pay more to use the same brands as their idols and to consult only influencers before making a final purchase decision.

Influencers create the most profoundly positive impacts on consumers who are willing to pay more in order to use the same brands with their idols and consumers whose main source of product information is influencers. Firstly, the respondents who agree with these two impacts also report Agreement with all other statements. Secondly, they have the highest amount of agreement to the statement 6, which implies influencers' recommendations are more trustworthy than brand-generated ads. Finally yet importantly, they both have higher trust in influencers in the previous question. The difference between the two groups is that those who are willing to spend more money are more inspired by their favorite influencers in terms of their brand selection whereas consumers who use influencers as their main product information channels report more positive

attitudes such as trust and likeness to the brands thanks to the promotions of influencers.

The role of influencers to brands are further elaborated by Figure 21. With approximately three quarters of the respondents opted for selections implying positive meanings. The most substantially confirmed effect is that consumers feel closer to brands thanks to influencers, with 40.3 percent of the respondents agreed with the answer. 31.4 percent of the respondents agree that Brands appear to be stylish and creative to them. That influencers confirm the quality of the brands is only selected by roughly a quarter of respondents (29), and only 19.3 percent and 10.9 percent think that these brands know their consumers well and are better than brands which have no influencers promoting for.

For participants who select Other and give their personal opinions, half of them tend to analyze the functions of influencers: "I think about the money payed for the influencers to estimate the cost", "(the brands) let media & public interest in influencers affect their promotion mix", "(the brands) are spreading awareness, and the chosen influencers showcase the spirit and characters of the brands, helping the brands position themselves and express their attitudes". Finally, brands are thought to be more memorable and attention attracting if being promoted by influencers.
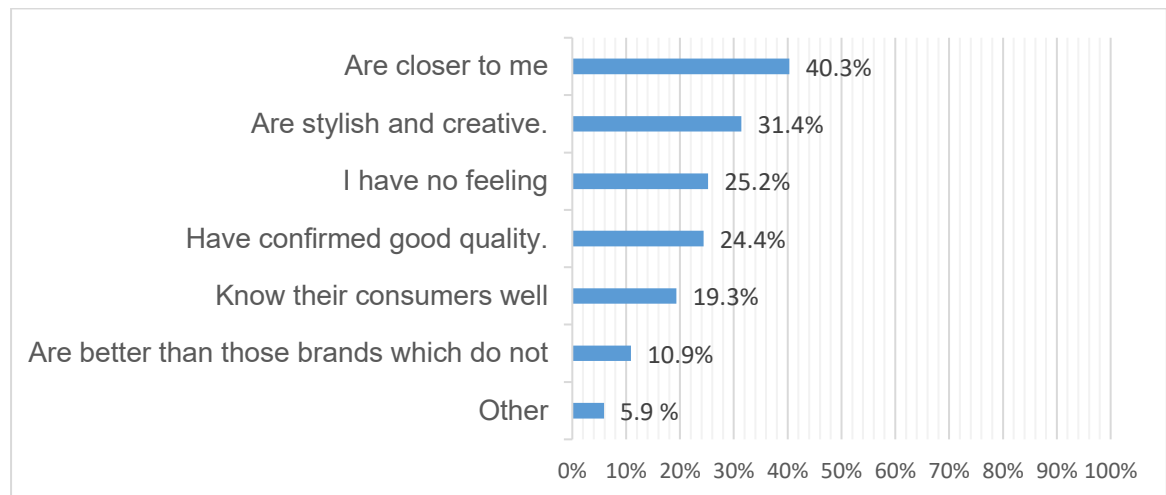

Figure 21 Images of brands promoted by influencers

As the result contains overlapping selection (meaning respondents who choose "I have no feeling" also select other options), the fraction of respondents who agree with options implying positive impacts is higher and all options are selected. Ergo, the result shows that each person receives different positive impacts. However, it is worth noting that there are some positive impacts which are voted to have more significant weight: "consumers *feel closer to the brands"* and "*consumers think the brands are creative and stylish".*

7.1.5 Perceptions of influencer marketing

Respondents were requested to evaluate how their social media experiences were affected by influencer marketing on a 10 Likert scale. Figure 22 elaborates the distribution of the respondents' attitudes.
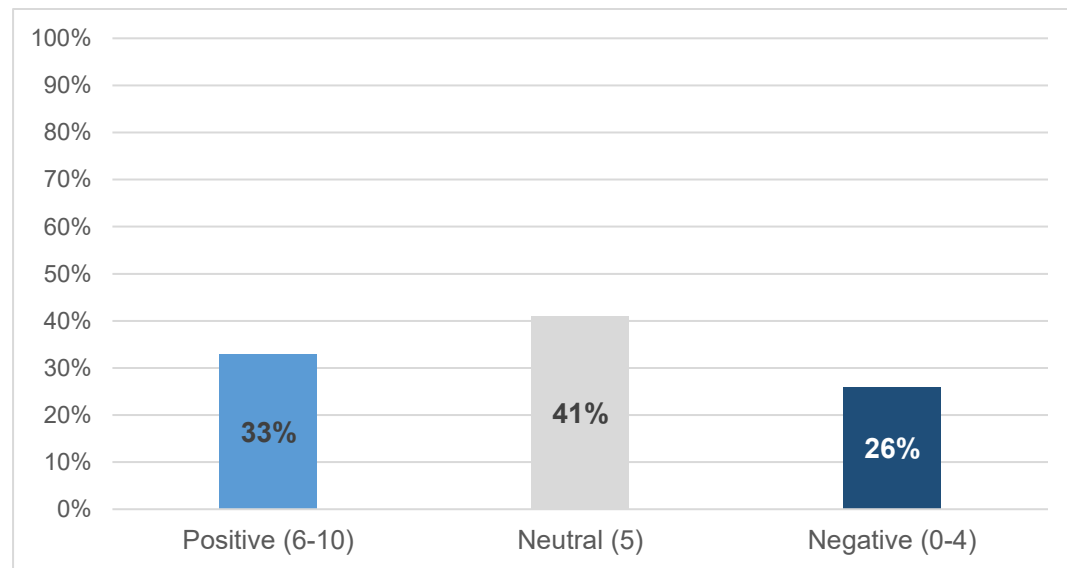
Figure 22 Evaluation of social media experience with influencer marketing (n=120)

Respondents' social media experiences are generally either the same or having positive effects by influencer marketing. However, the percentage of respondents that claim to have negative experience from influencer marketing is not so low (standing at 26 percent). The reasons for the evaluation are leaning toward the positive sphere where social media users find useful information and entertaining values in influencer marketing. The main concern of whom that response in the survey is the sincerity of Influencers.

Figure 23 presents responses from participants who have better social media experiences thanks to influencer marketing. The majority of sampling size (96 respondents) reported to receive the suggested positive effects.
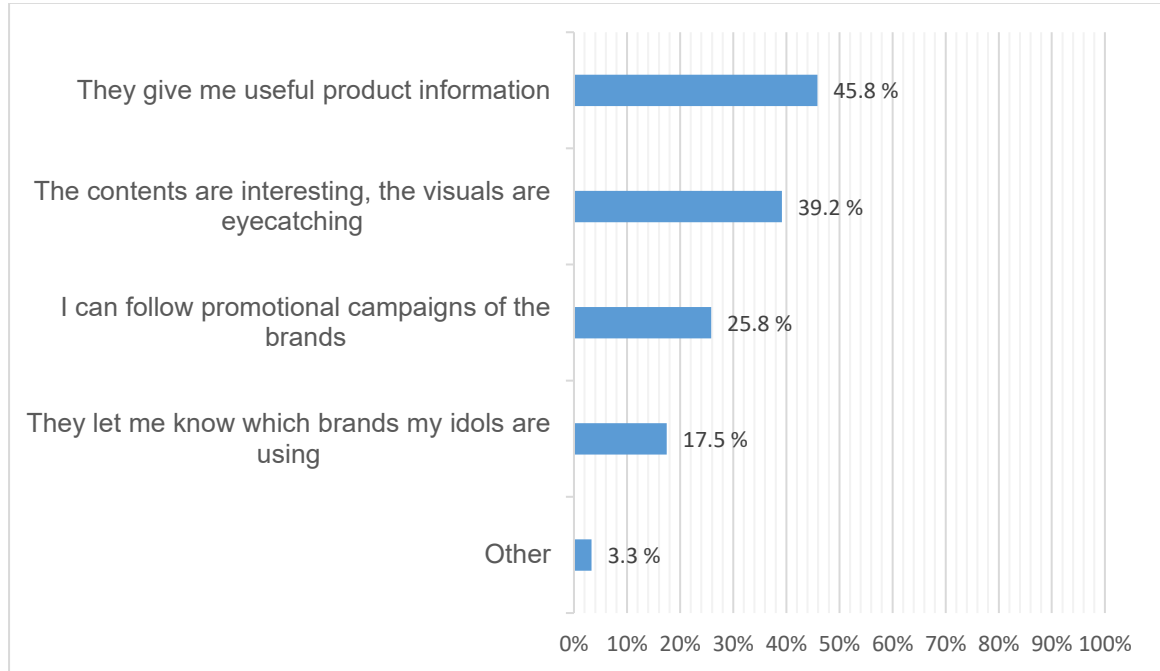

Figure 23 Reasons for positive feelings toward influencer marketing (n=99)

Judging from figure 23, the most prominent reason for consumers to enjoy social media with influencer marketing is for new knowledge acquisition about products and entertainment, as shown by the fact that 46 percent of the total sampling agree that influencer marketing give them useful product information and 39 percent agree that the contents and visuals are interesting. A quarter of all respondents (26 percent) enjoy receiving updates about promotional programs and roughly 18 percent of all respondents enjoy knowing which brands their idols are using. Another reason for enjoying social media recorded is that it provides confirmation of the quality of the products.

Regarding the reasons for negative feelings, 77 people answered this question and the result is illustrated in Figure 24. The most substantial reason for why influencer marketing worsens social media experience is due to trust issue, as 39 percent of the respondents think influencers are paid to talk about the products, thus lacking genuineness. 18 percent do not want to see advertising contents on

their social media. 11 percent of the respondents are only interested in the influencers.
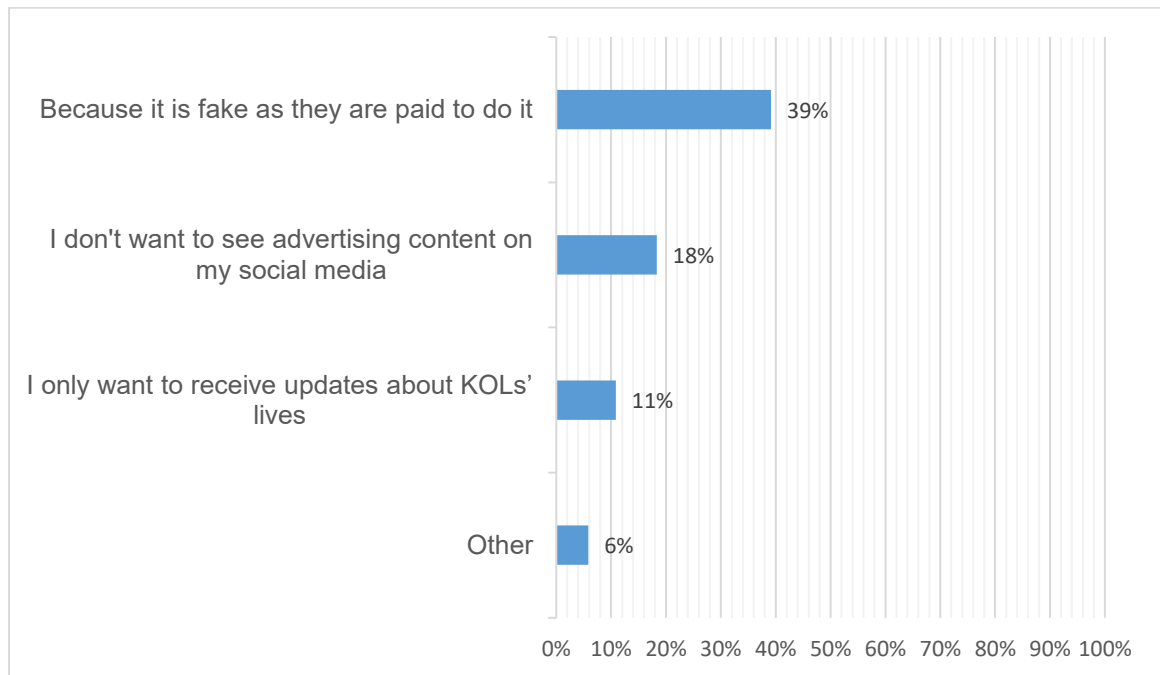

Figure 24 Reasons for negative feelings toward influencer marketing (n=77)

Other opinions on why respondents have negative feeling toward influencer marketing are: "those Key Opinion Leaders are nonsensical", "Vietnamese influencers are quite commercial since they accept the job offers although they might not have sufficient experiences with the products. Besides, they do not know how to deliver the advertising messages cleverly as their own words and experiences, making the contents very hollow", "I do not care about brands" and "I seek several sources before purchasing".

7.2   In-depth interview results

3 follow-up interviews were conducted after the survey result had been collected. As the interviews were semi-structured, a set of questions were planned beforehand to ensure the conversations would stay relevant and during the interviews, the informants brought up their own stories and observations along the questions as well. There were 3 informants. They shall be addressed anonymously as F1 (Female – aged 20-25), M1 (Male – aged 20-25) and F2 (Female – aged 20-25).

As stated in the Data Collection section, the interviews revolved around topics surfaced from the online survey. The results are going to be presented under several themes, according to the questions discussed with the interviewees. The knowledge of the informants about influencer marketing were inquired at the beginning and every informant claimed to know about the term. However, two of them (F1 & M1) said they only had a modest and vague definition of influencer marketing, which is considered a good sign as their perspectives are more likely to be purely based as a consumer. Moreover, this shows influencer marketing is by no means a new or unfamiliar term to young generation in Vietnam.

The purpose of influencer marketing was thought as: "by using the image of an influencer, companies can get close to their consumer with their marketing strategy". After completing the survey, respondents reflected that they acquired new knowledge about the marketing practice. For example, with M1, it is that "brand takes time to consider what celebrity to work with, which can really increase their overall authenticity". Respondents also learned about the role and importance of influencers to brands, that influencer marketing is a popular tool and a career related to this field has full of potentials.

Experiences with influencer marketing

Before participating in the Interviews, no informants gave much effort into analyzing promotion posts by influencers. It is true in a sense that influencer marketing is very prevalent nowadays, so such contents might appear as mainstream and can be easily disregarded. The mutual factor that can catch social media users' eyes in this case - the interviewees, are contents coming from whom they care about, especially their favorite influencers. After that, they might grow interest in trying out the products. Besides influencers, good visuals or eye-catching contents (with the use of characters or emojis) also attracts social media users' attention and hence, increases the effectiveness.

Respondents are more likely to be attracted to social media posts by their favorite influencers talking about the products they care about, as explained above.

However, if the products do not fall into the categories that respondents are interested in or they need at the moment, they will disregard the posts. For instance, F2 added that she was not always prompted to buy something just because her idol talked about it: "If it is my favorite influencer who is endorsing a product that is not of my interest or my need, I will not pay attention. If my favorite influencer is advertising for a product I care or need, I will definitely buy it even if the content or the visual is not that good". In the same manner, if the product being endorsed is of someone's interest, that person will be attracted regardless that it is not coming from their favorite influencer.

Influencers and the positioning of the brands

Respondents assumed that there was a logical correlation between a brand being endorsed by big celebrities and the reputation of that brand. Many brands, in order to show their status and brand positioning, select influencers whose fame can be equivalent to their positioning. Consequently, some consumers associate top famous influencers to the high tier of brands, meaning brands that have big celebrities promote for appear as well-known brands and will charge higher prices. Besides, famous influencers are thought to always try to earn more money, leading to brands charging higher prices in order to afford such influencers for reputations and to earn more profit. However, it is not always the case, as not all consumers expect brands to offer pricier or premium products when they have well-established reputations and high ad budgets to be able to afford popular influencers.

F2 commented that the roles of influencers' profiles and their target audience are still important in shaping the association in consumer perceptions: "if letting A-leveled stars promote for unsuitable products, it will not make the products appear to have better quality or gain positive reputation, but it might leave negative effects on in influencers (loosing trust) and the brands themselves (boycotting)".

Final push to purchase decision

There are different factors other than influencers in an influencer marketing campaign that drive consumers to final purchase decision.

The interviewees are most likely to consider the price and their budgets first. Moreover, they tend to rely on their own experience and judgement, so they would test the products out by themselves first or consult other sources (consumer reviews, websites etc.), then make the final decision. However, the products of course would most likely be something that they need or want at the first place.

The reputation of the brands promoted have some weight as well: "it also depends on the brand awareness. It should have a certain reputation about its brand image and quality in order to totally persuade me to buy it". In other words, a brand reputation for its image and its product quality influence her confidence in making a purchase from the endorsement.

Additionally, there are consumers who are extremely supportive of their influencers and willing to buy products the influencers are endorsing. However, there are also conscious consumers who do not buy from their favorite influencers since they have no interest or need for the endorsed products. There are many type of fans in a fan base of an influencer, thus the effect of the marketing efforts and the conversion rate shall vary across them.

The trustworthiness of influencers

Interviewees reported different ways to evaluate an influencer whether to trust his/her promotional contents. It can be by the feelings for the influencers, because if one decides to like somebody, it must come from one's impression of that person. Therefore, if the contents come from the influencers of whom the audience have good impressions, they will trust them.

Expertise is also an important determinant of a credible influencer. Having an influencer whose expertise is related to the field of the product gains more trust than other influencers who might be more well-known but have minimum or no

connection to the product. Suitable images are also important, contents by those influencers whose images do not fit with the products and unnatural pictures can be unconvincing. For example, "skin-care brands using mainstream (or mass) influencers has one problem: no one can confirm how their skins really are in real life without Photoshop, thus beauty-bloggers as influencers are more effective in this case".

The audience can be skeptical about the paid influencers, since "money will completely influence their views and opinions". Besides, the popularity of the featured brand also the judgement of the post: "that product itself does not have a strong brand status and recognitions makes a post hard to be trusted" .This leads to a paradox: new, small or unpopular brands use influencers to increase brand awareness but there are consumers who require the brands to have already established status so that they could trust the brands even more with the help of influencers.

How consumers prefer to be reached:

There is one common pattern that the three informants share, a pattern which elaborates the trust issues in consumers. According to the insights, the more wholeheartedly influencers promote a product, the higher chance they can win consumers over. The responses also contribute insights for the authenticity element in influencer contents, since the survey result shows that many consumers find influencers' posts unauthentic, meaning that they do not believe that influencers are being sincere about their contents.

In order to be persuasive and authentic in consumers' eyes, influencers would need to provide proofs which show that they actually use the products as well as being consistent and meticulous would further improve the contents. Additionally, "it would be better if there is an in-depth review and comparison between products. The KOLs should be continuing to consume the product even after the initial posts and to update on their opinions". Contents with useful and practical information including consumer benefits which attracts the audience, since expressing fondness only is insufficient and not helping the audience shape their

minds enough. Specific contents can contain details about, for instance, "regarding books: the title, author, target audience, summary of the book, what makes this book special and what readers can learn from it etc", or "What do you like about the product? The packaging, the effect, the taste? maybe something that you do not like? Because there is no absolute perfection". As it turns out, contents which can point out some drawbacks of the products are effective as reviews containing slightly (harmless) bad information appear to be more genuine than 100% positive contents.

Loyalty to particular brand is found to be an essential quality, as only when the influencer is truly satisfied using the brand and trust it for daily/frequent usage shall her/his words appear more valid to the audience and make them wonder about the products. One suggested way influencers could show loyalty is that capturing themselves using the product every day and upload on social media reviewing the product each day.

To sum it up, influencers or content copywriters should place their perspectives as consumers to understand what they wish to hear about the brands and products. However, as a matter of facts, not all contents by influencers are about product info or reviews but are rather generic and usually the focus is placed on the visualisation. In this case, F1 claimed that she knew the influencers were just doing their jobs, thus she was not impressed.

Vietnamese influencers evaluation

Informants were asked at the end of the interviews to rate the quality of Vietnamese influencers. Out of 10 influencers, no interviewee thought more than 5 were good in doing their job. F2 rated 1 out of 10 influencers credible with her justification as followed: "In the Vietnamese market, influencers such as singers and actors are very unnatural and boring when delivering contents about a product/brand. However, it is different among beauty-bloggers.". As consistent with the quantitative research, Vietnamese consumers have trust issues in influencers, the informants also showed similar patterns via their low evaluation in Vietnamese influencers' credibility.

7.3   Analysis of the results

In Vietnam, following famous people on social media is a popular activity among most of the social media users and Facebook & Instagram are the most frequently used for this activity. Contents with images stand the best chance to attract attentions and videos are the runner-up. Upon seeing a post of a famous people, reading the contents and pressing Like are the most common and second most interactions respectively. Besides, users show a higher willingness to share than to write a comment. Following famous people is reported to deliver entertainment values, enable social media users to acquire closer looks into the famous people' real lives and stay updated with their styles as well as work or projects, and provide social media users with the possibilities to acquire new knowledge and different perspectives on a social issue.

On the bright side, the results confirm that social media influencers indeed are influencing Vietnamese audience in many positive ways. Firstly, consumers associate influencers with the brands they endorse or promote for, which makes influencers an intangible brand asset, or part of brand imagery. Influencers also build consumers' affinity and trust for the brands, initiate interests in the product trials and become one of the forces that drive consumers to purchase. Besides, Vietnamese consumers tend to find influencers more credible than other brand advertisements. Furthermore, a large number of Vietnamese consumers reported feelings of excitements, happiness to use the same brands with their favorite influencers or idols, and most importantly, more confidence and satisfaction in the purchases and the product quality if they know their favorite influencers have used and confirmed the quality.

Examining into consumers perspectives about brands which adopt influencer marketing, generally brands receive positive attitudes from consumers. The most profound impact of influencer marketing found in the research is that consumers feel closer to brands. Secondly, brands appear in a more vibrant character through influencers. This result shows that influencers, as an intangible asset of brands, contribute to the brand imagery by giving them a voice, a personality and

defining brands characteristics. All of which engage consumers in building a psychological bond with brands and motivate consumers to build brand affinity. Applied in the Brand Resonance pyramid, the connection is visible: influencers spread brand awareness and at the same time are the brands' imageries. Influencers play an important role in expressing characteristics of brands, connecting brands to consumers, encouraging consumers to purchase and evaluate themselves, all of which leads to the creation of favorable brand attitudes, development of bonds with brands and eventually they will contribute to consumer strong loyalty, which is Resonance.

Consumers are more attracted to and persuaded by their favorite influencers or whoever they have good impressions of. Many Vietnamese consumers have made at least one purchase from their idols' recommendations. This shows that influencers boost sales, leading to more profits - the tangible aspect of Brand Equity. However, although consumers think it is logical that brands endorsed by big influencers can have premium pricing, only a small number of them is willing to pay more just to use the same products as their idols.

However, although the result shows that famous people are major interests among Vietnamese, they do not seemingly have a high degree of trustworthiness in Vietnamese people's eyes when it comes to their social media marketing efforts. A majority of Vietnamese either cannot determine whether they trust or not, or have low trust, leaving around a fifth of them who are certain that they trust influencers. Beside the possibility that their decision are not the same to all influencers and all contents, the distrust is the result from 2 major factors combined: first is that we are living in the era of trust crisis around the globe where people are in doubt, second is that the way Vietnamese influencers and specialists are doing influencer marketing is not effective enough, leading consumers to think that the contents are not authentic enough, that they seem unnatural and "all for the money". This can be considered as an obstacle to the success of influencer marketing and decrease the impacts it can achieve. Besides, consumers factor their own interests and needs, their budgets, confirmations from other sources, well-established brand reputations as well as

the quality of influencer endorsements before making a purchase decision. Therefore, influencers play a supportive part in the consumer journey. First, they increase brand awareness and generate interests in consumers, then lead consumers to purchasing. During and after the purchases, consumers feel confident, satisfied and happy when the products are also endorsed by influencers.

The concept of influencer marketing is not only no longer a strange term but also largely accepted by many social media users. Overall, consumers enjoy influencer marketing since they can acquire useful product information as well as entertain themselves from the contents. Promotion campaigns, benefit or rewarding programs are also among other main concerns of consumers. However, consumers report negative feelings with unnatural tones found in influencer contents. Another reason for such unfavorable sentiment is that social media do not appreciate advertising contents in their social media experience.

Since the result shows that consumers enjoy reading product reviews from influencers, insights show that specific, detailed contents are highly convincing. Effective messages would be able to tackle consumers' interests and concerns. Even though saying bad thing about a product seems wrong, consumers might believe more if an influencer can point out what she/he does not like about this product, adding more genuineness. Appropriate brand selection brings bring about benefits to influencers as well. Endorsing for many brands are perceived as a bad quality in an influencer, affecting his or her trust rating. Similarly, negative effects will surface if the brand's and the influencer's images do not fit with each other, for instance when the expertise is not relevant, or when a well-known influencer endorses for a low-class or unpopular brand. The results manage to explore other quality of an effective influencer and being selective and being loyal to a few brands are regarded as determinants for his or her trustworthiness. She or he would put in dedicated efforts to prove to consumers that she/he has truly experienced the product and can point of a few minor drawbacks. Moreover, ethics, creativity and content richness are of crucial importance as consumers are

currently dissatisfied with the how influencers are performing their jobs as brand endorsers.

Combining all the findings so far, influencers fit well into the category "somebody like ourselves" or "someone I know" in this perspective. Thanks to this "somebody", information about the product or the brand's value is communicated to consumers, and because they tend to trust this "somebody", they process the information in a favorable way. This "somebody" does not have to a super famous, as a beloved small-scaled influencer on YouTube for instance would have no less profound impacts on the viewers, as long as he/she speaks to the audience's hearts. Afterall, elements such as identities, personalities, target audience and how the brand messages and endorsements are delivered strengthen influencers' positions in the eyes of their audience.

8   CONCLUSIONS

8.1   Thesis results and discussion

This thesis has been built and executed with the ultimate goal to understand consumer sentiments about brands adopting influencer marketing as well as influencer marketing as a marketing practice. The role of influencers in a consumer journey is also an area which this thesis aims to explore further. A good amount of knowledge related to this study has been attained through the literature review, including the 2.0 net, social media and relevant frameworks on how the social media system is classified and how human psychology corresponds, brand management and the most important field, influencer marketing, and it is useful for future career prospect where social media marketing is not going out of trend anytime soon. Findings in this thesis also elaborated more for these knowledges. Compared to the Honeycomb by Kietzman et al, the collection of open answers from the survey indicates a fair connection between fulfilling psychological needs and using the same brands as favorite influencers. Moreover, influencers are found to be brands' intangible assets and fit well in the both definitions of Consumer-based Brand Equity by

Aaker and Keller. With the help of influencers, consumers have better attitudes and evaluations of brands, ergo establishing brand resonance.

A quantitative research coupled with a qualitative research were embraced to obtain general viewpoints as well as insights from problems surfaced from the survey results, which altogether accomplished the set of objectives for this thesis. The quantitative data collected set a big picture of the Vietnamese consumer perceptions, thanks to a fair number of respondents, and recorded the positive impacts among them. Besides, the allocation of selections and the answers to open questions contained plentiful of interesting consumer opinions about influencer marketing practice in Vietnam. Several problems surfaced from the quantitativen research and most of which related to consumers evaluation of influencers. Those problems gave rooms for the qualitative part to explore further, at a personal level. The interviewees were able to give insights and elaborate on their opinions and provided the thesis with both similar opinions as well as different behaviors and information processing patterns. Besides, there was no contradiction between the answers of the interviews and the survey results since the respondents really reflected on the results. Therefore, both researches fulfilled their jobs and contributed useful resources for this study wholly.

The impacts on brand generated by using influencers on social media

Influencer marketing has been confirmed to bring positive impacts on brands. Most substantially, influencers are the brands' imageries, representing the voices, values and characters for the brands. Generally speaking, brands are most likely to benefit from influencers with brand affinity and credibility, though only a small number of consumers think endorsed brands are superior to other brands. Moreover, the images of the brands are enriched with the touches of influencers as well as a psychological connection are built between consumers and brands. Besides, in terms of advertising tools, consumers tend to trust influencers more than other traditional channels or brand generated contents.

The role of Influencers in consumer journey.

The roles of influencers in a consumer journey have been found to be: making the brands memorable, initiating interest and curiosity in products and driving consumers to purchase. The position is rather supportive as consumers generally consult several sources of information and not many of them are either likely to make a purchase solely based on an influencer's endorsement or willing tolerate higher price. However, there is still a small number of consumers who see influencers as their main information source and are willing to buy more expensive products for their idols.

Furthermore, influencers bring positive feelings to consumers, such as happiness (being related and connected to their favorite influencers) and confidence (in the quality of the brands) post-purchase, which strengthens not only the bonds of influencers and consumers but also the bonds between brands and consumers.

Social media user perceptions of influencer marketing on social media.

Considering the consumer perceptions of influencer marketing, this marketing practice receives a remarkable recognition among Vietnamese. Despite being as a type of advertisement where brands sponsor influencers to talk about their products, most Vietnamese do not hold any negative attitudes toward influencer marketing on social media but rather find useful values added to their social media experiences such as new product information and entertaining contents. However, it is important to take into consideration that a percentage of the population has negative sentiments toward this practice.

In essence, influencer marketing is an effective marketing tool with the objectives to create and increase brand awareness, prompt interest in trial, to let brands express their values and characteristics via influencers, and build more intimate relationship with consumers. Influencers, overall, contribute to flourish the marketing communication mix. However, the positive impacts are still modest, as in many questions, there was a fair percentage of respondents who expressed Neutrality and Disagreement. This shows the tendency to be indifferent or to

disregard influencer contents about a product/brand does exist. Regardless, the findings suggested two possible underlying causes: that consumers do not trust, or they are not impressed and convinced by how influencers approach them. Another possible explanation is that the respondents have different reactions to different influencers, contexts or contents.

Discussion

Trust issue was the most outstanding issue throughout the research findings, which makes perfect sense in this Trust Crisis (Edelman 2017b). Low trust among Vietnamese inevitably leads to some unfavorable effects on influencer marketing. The root problem of low trust, beside general distrust in advertising, is connected to the lack of authenticity in influencers. This problem shows the reality that influencers and brands have not approached their target audience the way the audience want. The qualitative results suggested that the tastes of the audience are complex, thus there is hardly a one-size-fit-all approach for all brands across all sectors. However, there are several strategies that can be implemented to improve the effectiveness as well as the whole process of influencer marketing. For instance, collaborative efforts from both sides are highly recommendable to improve the authenticity of influencers which in turn, will recover faith in consumers.

First, brands and especially influencers should acknowledge that the impacts of their collaborations are versatile: brands have impacts on influencers as well. By delivering a poor content, an influencer lowers the trustworthiness of his/herself, somewhat degrades his/her image, and eventually decrease the success possibility of the marketing effort. By advertising for a brand which does not fit with the influencer image, damage can be done as well. By advertising for too many brands, consumers also find them too commercial. However, if this influencer manages to prove his/herself to be genuine in the endorsements or even better - loyalty, he/she can gain trust and good image in audience minds. Besides, it also means that influencers with high interactions do not necessarily deliver the desired outcomes as good as the less social media popular influencers.

Second, they should mutually invest serious efforts in the collaboration to come up with the best ideas combining knowledge about the brands and the audience of both parties, and placing the core focus on the consumer perspectives: what they want to hear and how they want to be reached etc. The low rating in Vietnamese influencers also paints the low quality of their efforts in delivering promoting contents. In order for influencers to influence consumers, brands should first inspire influencers about the merits of the brands to bring about enthusiasm as well as influencers should show cooperative ethics, then tailor and enrich the messages for their target audience, which, again, requires serious observations on the audience on social media.

Besides, cooperative and helpful influencers will attract long term collaboration which is beneficial in many ways: giving brands and agencies trusted faces for their projects, making the work easier, giving influencers attractive incentives (financially and non-financially) and other project offers as their reputations spread, signaling loyalty of influencers to the brands which is what convinces audience and creating a healthy working atmosphere among parties. In nutshell, selective screening of influencers and brands together with cooperative and ethical work spirit are essential to make influencer marketing successful.

8.2   Validity and Reliability

The credibility of a research is often discussed to see whether the findings are legitimate and is associated with two terms: Reliability and Validity

Validity is defined as the "truth" (Silverman 2000, 174) – how true and accurate the interpretation of collected data is and whether it measures what it is set to measure (Saunders 2009, 157). With regards to the quantitative research, the Validity is often tackled with 3 aspects: content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity, as combined by Roberts et al (2006, 43). Content validity is related to whether the measure cover all items related and is adequate to represent all aspect of the construct; Criterion-related validity concerns whether the outcome of the measure is related to that measure itself or other validated measures on the same construct; and Construct validity refers to the correlation

of the construct and other related concepts (Roberts et al 2006, 43). The Validity have been enhanced by several efforts, tackling all 3 aspects of Validity: building comprehensive literature frameworks to ensure the research is heading toward the right and most relevant directions; designing questionnaire with clear introduction, definitions of key terms and simple questions to allow respondents to fully understand the research areas and to follow the survey accordingly while constantly ensuring the links between the questions and the research objectives. Two versions of the survey were in use, Vietnamese and English, in order to minimise the misinterpretations of respondents by allowing them to choose which language they felt comfortable working with, to enhance the ability of respondents to understand the subject and answer accurately. The list of questions was built from several steps: designing the key areas of questions based on the theories and the research problems to make sure everything was interconnected, designing questions and arrange the order to guide respondents in a flow. The design of questions was sophisticated enough, in various interactive forms, so that readers would stay focused and avoid auto-pilot mode.

 As of the in-depth interviews, since they were under the scope of qualitative method, a different term will be introduced to justify this study: Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to "methodological soundness and adequacy" (Holloway & Wheeler 2013, 302), or the quality of the findings claimed by the author (Hammond & Wellington 2913, 146). Generally, the trustworthiness comprises of several factors: confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability and they are strengthened by the following efforts which were adopted in this study: competent member checking, preventing bias and misinterpretation by carefully noting and confirming with the informants, and triangulation (of methods). Moreover, documentation of every stage in the study was meticulously executed. The objective was not to create a theory or to generalise, but rather to explore the matter more, hence external validity ("generalisation" as defined by Saunders et al 2009, 158) should not be a major concern.

Reliability refers to the research method utilised by which consistent responses can also be collected by other researchers or across time (Saunders et al 2009,

156; Silverman 2000, 188). The Reliability of this study was ensured by a quantitative research which contained little element of subjectivity, trying to maintain a neutral viewpoint when doing analysis and continuously checking with informants and revising frameworks. However, this study was designed to examine Vietnamese' sentiments, which are influenced by several factors such as the culture, mentality and the rapidly changing digital trends etc. While the cultural element is rooted within a nation, some values can be changed over time as young generation takes over. Therefore, there can be differences in the final outcomes when a similar study is conducted in the far future, especially when Vietnam enters a new socio-economic phase or there is a change in the digital social platform infrastructure. Besides, as this study consisted of a qualitative study, thus should another researcher conduct a similar study, the interpretation might be different due to subjectivity which is an element of qualitative researches.

8.3 Limitations

The most prominent limitation is that the results are mostly presenting female young Vietnamese respondents. Mostly it was a result from snowball sampling, which is a convenient method to approach the easiest population to gather data, was adopted. The demographics are not sorted to geographic locations, thus possible differences between regions in Vietnam cannot be studied.

8.4 Suggestions for future researches

Based on the findings in this thesis, one can conduct a research to examine the trust issues, a quantitative research to find out the generalised traits of an influential Key Opinion Leader in consumers minds and an ideally effective content. Besides, future researches can take on brand, agency or influencer perspectives on their perceptions of the influencer marketing industry, to explore challenges and obstacles faced by each party; to measure influencer attitudes when brands use their names and voices to promote for those brands on their own social media accounts or to gather insights from agencies as most of the time, they are the connecting bridges between brands and influencers. Another

possibility to study of influencer marketing is examine differential impacts in different industries or on different demographics.

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FIGURES & TABLES

THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (English Version)

INFLUENCER MARKETING IN THE EYES OF VIETNAMESE CONSUMERS

Hi everyone. I am doing a research on influencer marketing (Marketing using Influential people on social media) on social media in Vietnam. This survey is a part of my final thesis for South-East Finland University of Applied Sciences. I hope you could spend approx. 5 mins to complete this survey.

This survey is for Research and Education purposes, not for commercial purpose. The individual answers will not be published widely but only for analysis. Thank you so much for your time and participation.

A: Follow Famous People on Social Media

1. Choose the best answers: Do you follow famous people on social media?

- Yes. I follow many famous people.
- Yes. But I only follow a few famous people.
- Seldom/No.

2. Who do you follow the most:

_____

3. Which platform do you use to follow famous people?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Youtube
- Other _____

4. You follow famous people because: (Multiple answers possible)

- I want to know about their real lives
- I find their uploads interesting and relatable.
- I learn many things from them.
- They share the same values as me.
- I follow their styles.
- I want to know which products and brands they use.

- Other _____

5. Rate the frequency of each interaction you take with famous people' posts:

Never   Occasionally   Quite Often   Very Often

- Read into the content
- Like
- Share
- Comment

6. Which type of post attracts your attention the most:

- Text
- Photo
- Video
- Livestream
- Other: _____

Key Opinion Leader (KOL) is the common name to call people who have certain influence on a community on social media. KOLs can be singers, actors, models, journalists, politicians and internet personalities etc.

B: KOLs & Marketing on Social Media

7. Rate the Trust-worthiness of Key Opinion Leaders' posts about products/brands on social media:

0: Absolutely Untrustworthy   3: Neutral   5: Very Trustworthy

8. Do you agree and disagree with these following statements? Agree/ Disagree/ Neutral

- I like a brand more if a Key Opinion Leader (KOL) posts about it.
- I trust a brand more if a KOL posts about it.
- Seeing a KOL posts about a product makes me want to try it.

- The more I like a KOL, the more likely I will buy the products she/he promotes for
- The more famous the KOLs are, the more credible their recommendations appear to me.
- I will prefer buying brands which are endorsed by KOLs than other products.
- I am willing to pay more to use the same brands as my idols.
- I do not like a brand if it uses the people I hate to promote
- I have made a purchase from a KOL's recommendations.
- I find KOLs' recommendations are more convincing than the brand advertisements (TV, newspapers, social media fanpages).
- I use KOL's recommendations as a main source of product info before making a purchase
- When I see a product, I remember the KOLs who promote for it.

Influencer marketing is a marketing practice that uses influential people (Key opinion leaders) to promote

9. Please specify your feelings if you use the same product as your idols:

10. Choose the statements you agree with: (multiple possible) I think brands which use KOLs to promote for their products/services.:

- have confirmed good quality.
- are stylish and creative.
- are closer to me
- know their consumers well
- are better than those brands which do not.
- I have no feeling
- Other _____

C: Influencer marketing and your perceptions:

11. Have you ever heard about influencer marketing?

- Yes. I know a lot about influencer marketing
- I have heard of the term and know a little.
- Not yet.

12. How is your social media experience affected by influencer marketing?

0: Annoyed/Interrupted   5: Neutral   10: Interesting/Positive

If you choose 5 or more than 5, please refer to question #13. If you choose less than 5, please jump to question #14. Thank you.

13. Why do you enjoy social media newsfeed with advertising posts of KOLs:

- They give me useful product information
- They let me know which brands my idols are using
- The contents are interesting, the visuals are eye-catching
- I can follow promotional campaigns of the brands
- Other. Please specify: _____

14. Why do you find influencer marketing unpleasant:

- Because it is fake as they are paid to do it
- I don't want to see advertising content on my social media
- I only want to receive updates about KOLs' lives.

Other. Please specify _____

15. Choose the statement you most agree with: If a famous person advertises for many brands at the same time, you find this person:

- Very trust-worthy because many brands know them.
- Quite trust-worthy
- No. Because: _____
- No Opinion.

16. Rate the Authenticity of advertising posts by Key Opinion Leaders:

0: Fake, unauthentic   10: Very authentic.

C: Who are you?

17. Select your gender:

- Male/Female

18. Your Age: Under 17, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-55, Over 55.

TABLES OF THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Min value	Max value	Mean	Median	Sum	Standard Deviation
0.00	10.00	4.89	5.00	587	1.97

	Slider value quantity	N	Percentage	SUM N	Percentage
Negative Spectrum	0	4	3%	31	26%
	1	4	3%		
	2	9	8%		
	3	8	7%		
	4	6	5%		
Neutral	5	49	41%	49	41%
Positive Spectrum	6	21	18%	40	33%
	7	12	10%		
	8	4	3%		
	9	0	0%		
	10	3	3%		
Total			120	120	100%

Table 2 Evaluation of social media experience with influencer marketing

Min value	Max value	Mean	Median	Sum	Standard Deviation
0,00	10,00	4,38	5,00	526	1,90

	Slider value quantity	N	Percentage	SUM N	Percentage
Unauthentic Spectrum	0	2	2 %	59	49 %
	1	4	3 %		
	2	20	17 %		
	3	8	7 %		
	4	25	21 %		
Neutral	5	30	25 %	30	25%
Authentic Spectrum	6	20	17 %	31	26 %
	7	5	4 %		
	8	3	3 %		
	9	2	2 %		
	10	1	1 %		
Total			120	100 %	120	100 %

Table 3 Respondents' evaluation of the Authenticity of Key Opinion Leaders