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SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCER
MARKETING TOWARDS CONSUM-
ERS' BUYING BEHAVIOR: THE
EMERGING ROLE OF MILLENNIALS
IN HO CHI MINH CITY

Case: Fashion Industry

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

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During the past decade, the internet in general and social media in particular has become one of the most indispensable elements creating rapid strides, enabling multiple global industries to interact and abolish certain distances in the brands and in consumers relationships. The strategy is called influencer marketing where brands have been lately integrating into their businesses through endorsements from influencers who have access to a large amount of audience has made a significant impact on the consumers' buying intention.

The objective of this thesis was to study the effect that social media and influencer marketing in the fashion industry has on millennials as online consumers in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. By examining the combination of theoretical studies, and evidences to support the theoretical findings through individual interviews with seven fashion influencers used as the sources of primary data collection, the results of thesis were collected. It is demonstrated that the perceived effect of the cooperation between social media and influencers have an obvious impact on millennials' buying behavior regarding the fashion businesses.

Finally, the results and findings with conclusions are were analyzed. In addition to the outcomes, limitation and challenges of the studies were discussed.

Keywords	Social Media, Influencer Marketing, Customers' Buying Behavior, Fashion Industry, Millennials, Ho Chi Minh City.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of the study introduces and discusses the process of integration between social media and influencer marketing and the impact it has on consumers' buying behavior. The targeted research area and subjects are indicated in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, specifically about the brand – customers' relationship between the fashion industry and Millennials aged 16-29.

1.1 Background of the study

In recent years, the rapid development regarding the use of social media and influencer marketing has changed the branding competition between businesses, especially in the fashion companies, who are considered the 'early adopter' of this strategy.

Young people around the world are currently living in an era where manipulation by brands with numerous of daily advertisements are not preferred, instead consumers rather make their own decisions. As businesses have started to understand this, a strategy called 'influencer marketing' is implemented as an efficient tool by narrowing the distance between brands and potential customers in order to gain trust and interest.

According to Robert Cialdini, six principles regarding the power of influence and persuasion are: reciprocity, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity. The third element, social proof, represents the meaning and purpose of influencer marketing - people tend to rely on other people before making a purchasing decision. They seek for credibility and affirmation from the people they are familiar with. This is when social media and influencer marketing interfere (Cialdini R., 2015)

1.2 Research structure

Following the introduction, the thesis will continue with the second chapter providing the overall information about the situation of the fashion industry and the achievement it has obtained since the development of digital age. Correspondingly, in the third chapter, different aspects of social media, from its definition to the pro-

gress of revolution and how social media has been able to improve global consumers' buying behaviors, will be discussed. In resemblance to the effects of social media in the previous part, influencer marketing will be introduced in chapter four as an explanation of its role in the fashion industry and how it serves as an efficient tool to businesses worldwide. The subsequent chapter will be the theoretical research of the chosen target of this thesis, Millennials. Specifically, I will discuss the generation's characteristics, buying behavior and media usage. Lastly, the comparison between traditional media and new media, along with the operation process and outcomes of social media and influencer marketing will be presented in the sixth chapter.

In the chapter on the empirical study, I will present the data collected using the qualitative methodology. The primary data of the thesis serves as a mean of support and practical evidence related to the findings and research on the topic of the study. Questions on the topic of social media and consumers' buying behavior in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam are presented to the experts in the area – the interviewees, to qualify the initial objectives of the thesis. The anticipated number of individual interviews is seven.

Lastly, the paper will end with a conclusion along with discussion on validity and limitations. Additionally, the references and appendices are found at the end of the thesis.

1.3 Research objective and questions

Social media, famous influencers, and fashion are several of the most well-known topics occupying young people's temporal concept today to those of millennials known as Generation Y.

Owing to the mentioned developing phenomenon, this thesis will carry out a thorough research on the impact of the integration between social media and influencer marketing towards Millennials in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

In order to attain the aims of the thesis, the following questions will be answered:

- What role does Social Media have in the lives of millennials?

- How has influencer marketing conquered the fashion market in Ho Chi Minh City?

1.4 Research limitations

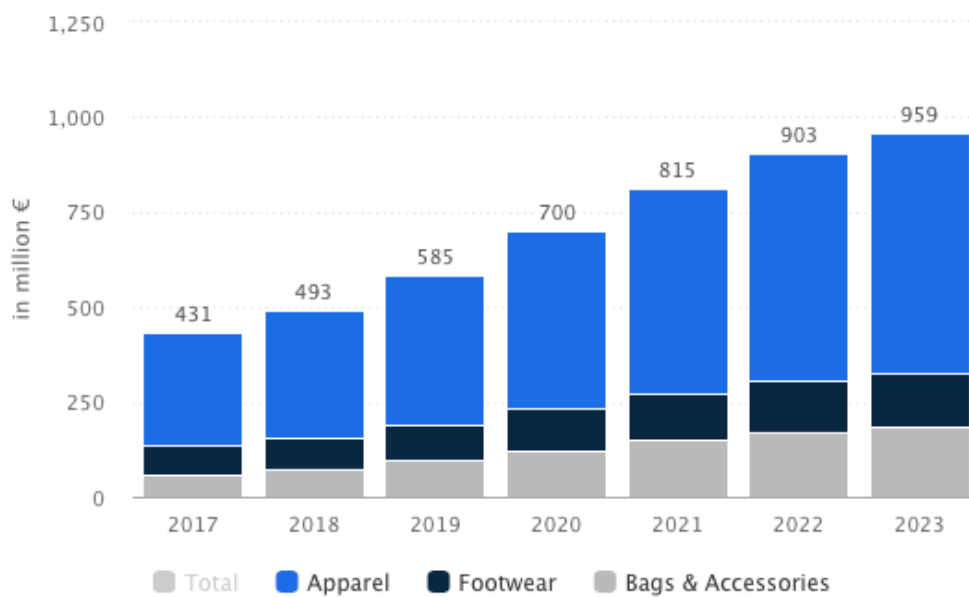
In the past decades, the topic of the thesis has received much attention and research studies with evidences by many experts worldwide. Hence, the thesis may provide the reader with a sense of familiarity and relatability. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the research only focuses on the specific area chosen for the topic – Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, the implementation of the findings may not be appropriate on an international scale. Additionally, the targeted business in the study is the fashion industry, which is experiencing major shifts and developments in Vietnam’s globalizing market. Considerably, it is not impossible for the findings to apply on the markets in other countries. However, those who intend to conduct research in similar areas (fashion, cosmetics, textile, etc.) ought to select the information precisely as each country owns different cultural behavior and market trends. Lastly, it is important to emphasize the saturation impact of the thesis. Due to the context of the topic, which highly involves well-known influencers and related people in the field of social media marketing, it can be challenging to acquire a large number of interviewees for the empirical findings. Hence, it was not possible to obtain more than seven experts for the study. I suggest that those who are interested in the similar topic, industry, and location should prepare to create relationships with related influencers in advance to serve the purpose of the thesis.

2. THE FASHION INDUSTRY

In this part of the thesis, the focus will be on the targeted industry which has been proven to be a significant advocate of social media and influencer marketing strategy. Tran Ha Mi, a Fashion Marketing Strategist, shared in an interview with Vietcetera on the Vietnam's fashion market that three words could be used to describe the country's current situation on fashion: 'Competitive', 'Social Media Driven', and 'Fast Changing' (Vietcetera – Tran Ha Mi, 2019). From the expert's point of view, the following sections will provide a detail analysis of the fashion industry.

2.1 The fashion industry in Ho Chi Minh City

Earlier in 2019, Vietnam's Fashion segment reached €585m in revenue with €394m generated from the Apparel sector and what is anticipated to present a compound annual growth rate of 13.1% from 2019 to 2023, leveraging the segment revenue to approximately €960 by 2023 (Statista 2019).



Source: Statista, September 2019

Figure 1 Revenue in million €

Ho Chi Minh City remains one of the two most solicitously welcomed cities to both local and international fashion brands in Vietnam besides the country's capital - Ha Noi.

In the beginning of 2016, it was estimated that approximately 200 international fashion retail brands were operating in Viet Nam, occupying around 60% of the market, which means that the local fashion retailers add 40% to the remaining areas (BBGV, 2017).

Along with the rapid impartation of urban characteristics, fashion-oriented shopping malls within Vietnam in general, and IN Ho Chi Minh City in particular, are expected to have an essential in the future of the country's fashion retail segment. Ho Chi Minh City is well-known for the crowded existence of competition between fast-fashion, premium and high-end brands. Similarly, local contemporary retailer brands are on the road of defining their signature value and influence on the young people. Here in Ho Chi Minh City, or 'Saigon' as an intimate and familiar name to its residents, brands, both international and domestic, share the same goal, to acquire local exposure.

According to EU-VIETNAM Business Network, the land of Vietnam is rapidly becoming one of the world's most congregating places of luxury brands attracting approximately 1.5 million citizens (EU-VIETNAM Business Network).

In recent years, the local consumer buying behavior has changed due to the presence of multiple foreign and local brands varying from different price ranges and product qualities. Prominently, the quick rise of local brand concepts and offerings to Generation Y, who remains the main consumers of the industry, and Generation Z, who is expected to shape the future of the local fashion industry, has raised the competition level between the international and the domestic players.

As urbanization continues to play a crucial role in the developing digital age, concept stores and retail locations are not the only factors influencing the consumers' buying behavior, but online marketing and retailing channels will be the elements creating differences and improvements in brands performance.

2.2 The emerging role of the fashion industry in the digital age

Differently from other countries around the world, in Southeast Asia, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, doing businesses through social media has developed rapidly even before the accession of the commercial digital wave.

Up in January 2019, the number of Vietnamese using Facebook had reached 61 million users (Digital 2019 Vietnam, We Are Social). Additionally, Instagram and Youtube remain one of the most favorable media platforms in the area. Recently, TikTok has been showing significant growth and gaining great interest from Generation Z. Nevertheless, using TikTok as a business platform is as yet an experiment (Business of Fashion).

In Ho Chi Minh City, Instagram has been chosen to be one out of five media platforms which has the most influence of media users (Viet Times, Viet Nam News and Analysis). It has shown that social media is the ideal marketing tool for approaching potential customers, mostly young females.

Julia Doan, the founder of Floral Punk with 215k followers on Instagram and is one of the top choices of millennials and Generation Z, when it comes to choosing elegant accessories in Ho Chi Minh City shared in her views in an interview with Vietcetera the importance of displaying contents. When she first started pursuing her career, everything was relatively easier as there were not many brands using media to promote their businesses in Viet Nam, especially on Instagram. However, up until the recent years when the fashion industry has become increasingly competitive, in order to create one's own uniqueness and salient points and approach more users, brands need to produce and innovate new valuable contents constantly. She continues by stating that visual guideline is significantly necessary for fashion retailers, pictures have to be prominent in the eye of the media users. This is when marketing starts. (Vietcetera - Julia Doan, 2019)

The number of potential customers increasing on social media has created opportunities for brands to develop a new way of selling their products. Deb Liu, Vice President of Facebook Marketplace, in an interview with Forbes stated that brands will be forgotten if they do not have a proper presence on social media. Noticeably, the best way to absorb feedback and opinions from customers is through direct conversation (Forbes, 2018).

3. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media can be observed as an interactive media where mutual communication occurs between brands and consumers, or users to users. In this chapter of the thesis, I will discuss the different aspects of social media in order to provide a comprehensive overview and the role it plays in the digital era.

3.1 What is Social Media?

To grasp the existence of social media, the following parts consist of the definition, characteristics and the zones of social media. The expectation is that the readers will be able to obtain a wide and diversified view on the user-generated contents which social media present.

With the rise of urbanization and digitalization, social media has become a crucial concept which humans use to utilize the level of daily interaction with each other (Manning J, 1158, 2014). Nevertheless, as social media consists of a wide range of sites, uses, and characteristics, it is difficult to give an exact and comprehensive definition. With social media being a broad spectrum of ideas and functions, it can be generalized as a place where people share contents and opinions varying from stories, comments, and photos on individuals or groups' interests, concerns, beliefs, and find those who have the same ideals or sense of purposes. Overall, social media allows and encourages users to be active, giving users opportunities to interact, communicate, create, share and learn at the same time. Additionally, the concept can be used for both entertainment and work purposes (Tuten T. & Solomon M., 2013).

3.1.1. The Characteristics of Social Media

Back when social media was a new concept to users, it was considered unfamiliar and unnecessary. Nonetheless, in the past years, as they slowly merged into the lives of people, social media existence as one's profile, whether it is personal or professional, has been considered an integral part of identity on a social level (Helal G. & Ozuem W., 2019).

There are two basic characteristics that can define the nature of social media: participation and interaction. To begin with, active participation, the trait that sets the

difference between modern media and traditional media, is considered the minimum level when using social media. In spite of the fact that users passively scroll through their systematically displayed newsfeed on social sites such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, social media requires basic active involvement consisting of creating profiles, adjusting newsfeed preferences, browsing and choosing channels or accounts to follow for further possible interaction. Secondly, after the participation phase, social media helps in engaging in interaction. Users can simply choose who they prefer to connect with on a daily basis, from family, relatives and friends to people who share the same interests or beliefs. These two characteristics contributed to the revolution of social media (Manning J., 1158, 2014).

3.1.2. The Zones of Social Media

In times when civilization has a significant effect on how communication works, social media has reached beyond the combination of mass media such as newspaper and television broadcasts, and personal media such as letters and email in terms of modest levels of exchanging messages and information. It means social media has given users the ability to communicate with not only a small number of people but also millions of citizens worldwide (Van Dijck J., 2013).

In order for both individuals and businesses to recognize, compare and choose the suitable channels for their purposes, Tuten and Solomon have created a figure arranging different channels into categories called the four 'zones of social media, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The Zones of Social Media (Tuten and Solomon 2013, Chapter 7, Part 1)

As social media technologically facilitates the expressing and sharing of ideas and thoughts through a platform of shared participation, the authors of the book indicated that two or more zones may overlap each other. Therefore, the four zones are not fixed and permanent.

The first zone is Social Community. Social communities involve channels which concentrate mainly on building personal networks and relationships online. These channels are commonly accessed and used by individuals who would like to express their opinions, interests, beliefs, and/or experiences on multiple matters that occur globally. Most users, when starting to explore social media, participate in these channels. The channels in Zone 1 such as social network sites (SNS) and forums enable private and individual engagement for users. For instance, SNS, such as Facebook, allows users to have access to hundreds of activities in just one app, from gaming to sharing locations, feelings, moods and checking for weather forecasts. The nature of these sites offers simultaneous and intermittent communicating experience. Hence, the results might be perpetual or transient.

The second zone is Social Publishing. Social publishing involves producing knowledgeable contents on various sites such as blogs, media sharing site, micro-sharing sites and macro-sharing sites. Both social community sites and social publishing

sites encourage users to share. However, social community sites promote creating personal networks, whereas social publishing sites enable people to share user-generated content such as work and knowledge without having to consider the customary limitations and barricades. This leads to the homogeneity between social publishing and democracy in the modern world. Contemporary social publishing introduces democratic reforms to the issuance of content. Social publishers are divided into four categories: individual users, independent professionals, organizational professional contributors, and lastly, brands. Today, the most common case is brands using social publishing sites to promote and market their products, collections and projects.

The third zone is Social Entertainment. The social entertainment channels refer to the sharing which stimulates the participants' amusement and delight. These channels focus upon illustrating entertainment contents including games, music and videos. Platforms performing these features are, for instance, Youtube, Apple Music and Spotify. In the section of social entertainment, social games with the solid profits are considered the most modern channel.

The fourth and final zone is Social Commerce. Social Commerce relates to social sites, which serve the purpose of online retailing, selling, shopping of services and products. Overall, it encourages sellers and buyers to be involved in marketing products/services in online groups and communities. The zone facilitates purchasing by circumscribing the online marketplace, intermediate selling and buying agencies. These sites influence users to participate by sharing selling and purchasing experience, reviews, opinions and recommendations. They help consumers feel more informed when making decisions.

3.2 Social Media as a Marketing Communication tool

Back to the years when social media were not the elements changing the marketing industry, when traditional marketing was referred as the creating, promoting and offering information and deals to potential and existing customers and partners, companies relied on a marketing mix method named 4Ps: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place (Singh M., 2012). Today, when social media has been proven to be the microcosm of human beings and societies, a fifth P needs to be added to the

line: Participation. It does not matter how complex the aims and objectives of organizations are, social media marketing is the most practical and advanced method for approaching the customers and leveraging the image of the organizations in the eye of the public (Rishika R. et al., 2012).

After the existence of the Horizontal Revolution, people started to gain access to information without limitation. The information flows around the circle of users, escaping from the boundaries of companies to people and restriction filters. Users now express their ideas and opinions on digital media and individually connect with others around the world (Gonzalo A. & Alberto A., 2015).

Similarly, the way which the Horizontal Revolution abolished the bound in communication, social media raises the reciprocal standards between businesses and consumers. In the past, businesses used traditional marketing focused on conveying their messages to the mass audience in a one-way vertical model, where mutual interaction with the consumers was not the primary preference and priority to the brands. In other words, the businesses' messages were transmitted using a top-down method (Tuten T.L. & Solomon M., 2013).

The rise of e-commerce appeared around the 1990s when digital technology advanced and businesses had a new way to promote and deliver their messages other than television and printed media (Dewing, 2010). Even when customers started to be interested in the concept of online purchasing, the 4Ps method was still implemented. This method called Tradigital Marketing changed the way people see and handle advertisements and messages through a different platform; however, it did not change how messages were conveyed and transmitted in a vertical manner.

In contrast, social media make users feel that they have the right and the voice to a certain business and their opinions matter to a brand (Vogel V., Evanschitzky H., & Ramasechan B., 2008). Contrasting the traditional media where users were interrupted while watching their favorite programs on television to see advertisements which most likely they did not prefer to be bothered by, social media gave users to the power to seize control of the amount of messages from brands they want to hear about. Users have the ability to access, value, discuss and share their opinions directly with the brands to enhance the brand - customers relationship in order to

balance inbound marketing and outbound marketing (Smith P. & Zook Z., 2011). Companies can use social media marketing to gain an in-depth insight in order to get to know their customers' needs and opinions, to publish products, ideas and contents, to create partnerships in the most convenient and low-cost way possible (Kaplan A. & Haenlein M., 2011). Overall, businesses can attract customers who have the power to attract more customers (Huy Q. & Shipilov A., 2012).

During the digital era, social media act as a tool to enhance marketing and promote consumer approach. It does not replace traditional marketing. Social media marketing uses traditional marketing as a platform to improve companies' performances, to leverage the users' experience and interaction among customers (Tuten T.L. & Solomon M., 2013).

3.3 The psychology of shopping on social media

This part of the chapter refers discusses the elements effecting consumers' decision on purchasing mainly bases on the model developed by Tuten and Solomon.

In today's developing business market, consumers are given numerous choices that brands competitively introduce every day to relating to customer relationships, building brand awareness and creating growth in sales (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014, 328-344). Additionally, in reality, consumers have their own perceptive prejudices, which Tuten and Solomon referred to as 'Cognitive biases'. This aspect appears in the process of decision-making where consumers are presented to unlimited choices and might create impacts on the way consumers elucidate the process. With the rise of social media and many others shopping sites, users have the ability to access all product information and quality in order to consider before making the decisions, which is the aspect that traditional media is lacking (Filo K. et al., 2015, 166-181). However, at the same time, there is an existence, which relates to the perplexity that humans encounter when having a variety of selections but are restricted by cognitive capacity called Bounded Rationality.

Consumers are now exposed to the advertisements and reviews on social media, the recommendations from family and friends, and the information from online search

engines, causing an excessive load of data (Chen et al., 2011, 85-94). In the occurrence of the event, consumers will find ways to modify and adapt to enough information in order to make a decent and acceptable decision, using bounded rationality. Hence, the information gathered and chosen may not be able to present the best choices of product. In other words, by making the process less complex, consumers are 'thinslicing' the amount of information given.

Under the circumstances, it is a challenge for each company to win the heart of the consumers among many alternatives. It is not a choice for marketers when it comes to establishing social media - it is how well they handle it. (Erik Qualman 2010, 286) Therefore, businesses who seek to consolidate their positions in the market will need to understand the six elements affecting consumers' buying behavior called the Psychology of Influence. (Tuten T.L., Solomon M., 2013, 175).

The first factor influencing the decision-making process is Social Proof. Consumers, when facing many choices, may allow the herding effect to occur by having a tendency to monitor and follow the previous actions and selections of other purchasers (Rao H. et al, 2001). Social proof means a product is chosen, purchased and reviewed by a large number of consumers, gaining certain approvals from the public (Talib Y. & Saat R., 2017). There are many ways that businesses can promote social proof from consumers. The most common method is presenting the companies as the leader in the market, and this approach is adopted by an abundant number of companies.

Since social proof is considered a result influencing consumers' buying intention, there is a factor creating it – Conformity. Conformity can be defined as activities complied according to the predominant norms and criteria created in the society (Deutsch M. & Gerard H.B, 1955). Humans conform in accordance with the following five elements:

The first element is cultural pressures. Conformity appears on a variety of scale in different cultures (Bond R. & Smith P.B., 1996). For instance, the Asians in general promote unity by following the standards of collectivism. The Western people, on the other hand, mainly encourages individualism. A Korean consumer can purchase an item by more heavily relying on the level of conformity in the society than a

French, who follows the freedom of expressing the uniqueness of oneself. The second element involves fear of deviance. This second element represents the individual's fear of aberration and abnormality, compared to the rest of the group or the society. One might be concerned or frightened at the thought of being isolated by the others for not following the conformity standards (Martin R. & Hewstone M., 2001). The third element revolves around commitment: The level of conformity in this case depends on the degree of commitment one member may feel to a group. The higher commitment from the member, the higher conformity he or she performs (Meade M.L. & Roediger H.L., 2002, Walther E. et al., 2002, Wright D.B. et al., 2000). The fourth one is group unanimity, size, and expertise: In a society or country where power develops strongly and one is being accountable for another's actions, acquiescence expands along with conformity (Lerner J.S. & Tetlock P.E., 1999). The last element is the susceptibility to interpersonal influence: this last component is more likely related to young people, where the pressures of popularity and social media effect the perception on their position as human beings. In other words, these people need to feel the respect, admiration and curiosity from others (Quinn A., & Schlenker B.R., 2002).

The next factor creating impacts on consumers' mind is Authority. To explain Authority in a business strategy context, it is the method where brands collaborate with influencers or famous individuals who expertise in the area of products to influence the choice of users. In the world where the dominance of social media is undeniable, consumers have a tendency to be interested and convinced by the opinions and reviews of influencers, whether or not they are sponsored content from brands (Mackie D.M., 1987). Apart from individuals with popularity and endorsements on social sites, experienced users remain one of the subjects who have the authority to impel the sales of companies, even though they are not paid.

The third factor is Scarcity, which brands use significantly to finalize the consumers' buying decision (Howard D.J et al., 2007). Humans have the habit of more likely wanting to have an item if it is limitedly produced or running out of stock. By understanding this phenomenon, businesses tend to create and promote deals, sales, and discount programs in a limited time offer in order to provoke the desire

of having the items from the consumers (Knishinky A., 1982). Brands claim that the products are a part of a seasonal sales and that they will not be restocked after the indicated date. However, it is most likely false. Similar to collaborations with celebrities or influencers on a limited collection which state to stop being sold in, for instance, a month. As a result, consumers flock on to buy the products believing that they will be the niche components of the group to own the items (Simonson I., 1992). After the sales, several months pass and brands decide to restock the collection explaining the action is because they received many inquiries on resupplying the products. In reality, the case happened to the consumers in Viet Nam from a collaboration between the local jewelry brand – Shimmer Silver and their collection ‘Into the Galaxy’ made with the Instagram influencer named Jess Huynh. (Shimmer Silver, limited collection 2019).

The fourth element is Affinity. Similar to Authority, Affinity is salvaged by brands on social media. People tend to agree to the opinions or advice from individuals that they have special feelings for (Dijksterhuis A. & Bargh J.A., 2001). By identifying the influencers who consumers like and tend to follow for advice, companies use paid sponsored contents with these influencers to establish affinity and increase level of interest or push sales index since social media channels are the embodiment of affinity. Presented in Figure 3, one of the tools which promotes affinity is recommendations, specifically from influencers and friends that one loves and trusts.

The next mentioned factor is Reciprocity. In the cultural context around the world, whether it is Asia, Western, America or Africa, people share the same characteristics called reciprocity, where they feel responsible for repaying the kindness or appreciation that others have given them (Burger J.M., 1999). Considered in business context where brands constantly creating strategies to promote Reciprocity affects consumers’ buying behavior as this fifth feature represents the profound characteristics in a human’s mind. Businesses strive to establish mutual reciprocity by, for instance, sending discount codes messages to help celebrate a consumer’s birthday according to the membership program. After receiving the gifts, the consumers may feel that they would need to purchase from the brands to establish brand loyalty with them, as an action to thank them or repay their kindness (Cialdini R. et al.,

1975). Hence, as presented in Figure 3, brand butler services and deal feeds are listed as supporting tools for social shopping.

Regarding the last element, when consistency of an activity is established, people feel the need to repeat and maintain the activity for their own comfort (Cialdini R. & Trost M.R., 1998). Businesses use this idea to advocate the consumers into commitment. For instance, Spotify offers new users one-month free trial to experience the Premium Membership including many benefits: listening to one's favorite music without advertisements in the middle of the song, downloading an unlimited source of music, and offline streaming at places with no internet. After one month testing the Premium Membership, users will be accustomed to the features offered that if they return to the Free Membership program, there will be a feeling of cognitive dissonance, according to the authors. Hence, with the desire to continue the consistency, consumers pay for the Premium Membership to not disconnect their user habits (Tuten T., Solomon M., 2013, 176 – 179).

Social Shopping Tool	Social Proof	Authority	Scarcity	Affinity	Consistency	Reciprocity
"Ask your network"				*	*	
Brand butler services					*	*
Deal directories			*			
Deal feeds			*	*		*
Filters	*					
Group buy			*			*
Lists	*			*	*	
Recommendations	*	*		*	*	
Referral programs	*	*	*	*		*
Reviews	*	*			*	
Share tools	*			*		
Shop together				*		
Storefronts				*		
Testimonials	*	*				
User forums	*	*				*
User galleries	*			*		*
Geo-location promotions			*		*	

Figure 3 Social Shopping Tools and Sources of Influence (Tuten and Solomon 2013)

4. INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer Marketing demonstrates a modern type of self-reliant third-party gratifiers, who form the audience sentiments through different platforms such as tweets, blogs, and other platforms (Freberg K. et al., 2011, 90-92). In this chapter, the discussion will involve the definition of Social Media Influencer, its methods to succeed and how it conquered the fashion industry.

4.1 What is Influencer Marketing?

As an enhancement to the traditional marketing aspect, influencer marketing is the expansion in the method Word-of-mouth (WOM). Influencer marketing, from a

brand's perspective, can be defined as progress of recognizing and collaborating with highly anticipated individuals in order to reach a certain amount of audience (Burke K.E., 2017). It concentrates on the media milieu and it is resented in a competent level. The collaborations between the brands and the influencers serve multiple purposes. For the businesses, the expectations when executing a marketing strategy vary from higher sales for a collection to A wider amount of interest and engagement than the business itself (Escobar-Rodn'guez O. & Bonson-Fernandez R., 2016). Overall, influencer marketing relies on the objectives of gaining trust and authenticity; it helps businesses grow brand awareness among the public in order to create potential customers for further brand loyalty (Sudha M, Dr. Sheena K., 2017, 16).

In reality, there can be two types of influencer marketing: earned and paid. From the brand perspective, earned influencer marketing normally relies on pre-formed relationship with the influencer. The influencer performed an unpaid or earned marketing agreement most likely to increase personal media awareness. This method is used frequently with Micro Influencers with higher than 1000 followers, known as everyday influencer, and users with followers between 10,000 to 100,000, classified as premium influencers (Forbes, 2019). On the other hand, paid influencer marketing would include more detailed processes between the brand and the potential chosen influencer, for instance topics regarding budgets and agreed upon the expected

amount

of

audience.



Figure 4 Michelle Choi sponsored post on Instagram (@michellechoii)

The collaboration contexts may vary from sponsorship contents, giveaways to brand ambassador programs on different platforms such as blogs, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Businesses adopt influencer marketing to create trust and loyalty, to stem conversation and interest in the brands, and to increase popularity along with reaching KPI in-store and online at the end of the month. (Sudha M and Dr. Sheena K. 2017, 16)

4.2 How can Influencer Marketing succeed?

This subsection of chapter four will discuss the core reasons on the success of Influencer Marketing today based on Everett M. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory (1962).

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory categorized society into five adopters of new ideas and inventions in order to explain their characteristics which eventually lead to their adopting behavior.

The image of the figure from a recent date source (Trend Jackers, 2019) will be used in order to demonstrate a clearer diagram than the sketch demonstrated in the book.



Figure 5 The Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Everett M. Rogers 1962)

The author of the theory, Everett M.R., discussed the five adopters as ‘ideal’ types as the result of the theory was based researches and supervision on reality situations.

The first adopters listed in the graph are Innovators. The innovators main characteristic is described as venturesome due to willingness to take risks and experience new things, holding the gatekeeping title of the society. They ought to manage ambiguity and doubtfulness, as they are the leaders of the line. This feature puts them in the position of cosmopolitans, escaping from the context of regional networks (Bagley, 2014). Their role in society might not be valued by other types of adopters, however, innovators create new ideas without limitation and introduce them to the society in which needs for further enhancement to develop.

The second category is called The Early Adopters, the rather more integrated localities compared to the Innovators. In spite of the fact that Innovators stand first in the line of adopters, The Early Adopters are considered the leaders by the society they live in, playing the role model and the advisor that others find respectable (Chi C., 2018). Hence, other later adopters usually wait for The Early Adopters’ opinions

before trying a new product. The Early Adopters' goal is to obtain the title, the trust and the respect they received from the potential adopters by making prudent judgment and selection from Innovators' offerings.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the theory demonstrates that the characteristics of the first two adopters – Innovators and The Early Adopters are the most compatible to an influencer's features and work. People in the social system, classified as Early Majority, Late Majority and Laggards, or as known as 'followers', tend to wait for the ideas and decisions from the Innovators and mostly The Early Adopters, delivering the opinions through the media in order to help reduce skepticism before purchasing an item.

The third adopters in line are the Early Majority, placed closely before the average groups of the society. The Early Majority is describes as having tendency to consider carefully by connecting regularly with others around. Nonetheless, Early Adopters rarely lead. In other words, they choose to follow and adopt the decisions of the Innovators and The Early Adopters before the rest of the social system (Bloomenthal A., 2019). The role that Early Majority plays is the connection between the first two and the last two adopters.

The fourth player following the Early Majority is the Late Majority. The main feature of the Late Majority in the position of the followers is doubtful. According to the reality observation from the theory, the reasons behind the Late Majority being slow to adopt an idea are because of financial circumstances and stress growing from social media. In reality, the innovation ought to show certain usefulness and gaining interest from a large number of consumers to be able to successfully persuade the Late Majority (Tobbin P. & Adjel J., 2014).

The last adopters mentioned in the graph are Laggards. Laggards are the traditional part and slow adopters of the society. Laggards tend to make decisions bases on the choice given by the past generations to gain an absolute assurance of the products due to their lack in resources, unlike nonadopters (Uhl K., Andrus R., Poulsen L., 51-54, 1970). There is a possibility that when laggards are questioning their intention to buy, Innovators have already been giving new ideas and inventions to the

world. For this reason, these adopters are likely to defer the innovation and development of the society. However, it is important to note that Laggards should not be blamed individually for delaying the process of urbanization. Therefore, system-blame would be a more appropriate reason behind this matter (Everett M. Rogers, 245-251, 1962).

4.3 How it works in the fashion industry

To many individuals, fashion is described as the element with great impacts onto lives, representing not only economic and social standards of a society, but also the personal identity of oneself (Freitas A. et al., 1997). In any existing industries, there are buyers and consumers who have different behavior when making a decision to purchase from a brand. The differences between buyers and consumers are that buyers act as the final and fundamental purchasers, whereas consumers relies on a more complicated process including companies' services, products quality and post-purchase experience. Particularly in the fashion industry, the word 'consumers' refers to the individuals who constantly and avidly monitor the new fashion related updates as a method to satisfy their habits and needs on a daily basis. In reality, both brands and consumers unavoidably face impediments during the process of selling and purchasing due to the encounter of consumers' problems in the decision-making process. Most likely, the amount of information and marketing contents from numerous of businesses on the same social media platforms are giving the consumers a significant number of choices. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to understand both the potential and existing consumers' situations in order to choose the suitable solutions. This is the phase where social media influencers appear to change the consumers' mind.

In today's community where consumers with great interest in fashion are influenced by many existing propagandas about trends, seasonal collections, models, and sales through magazines, television, radio, and most anticipated, social media. Influencers such as artists, models, bloggers, and youtubers are considered the authentic and trusted individuals who consumers find to gather opinions. In other words, influencers are seen as experts by using their voice, positions, ideas and judgements to convey opinions to a certain large number of audiences, as known as followers who

idolize influencers. Additionally, consumers are more inclined to the idea of believing other consumers than businesses' advertisements. If an influencer can persuade a specific number of followers, purchasers will eventually spread the words to convince the later majority. Hence, brands understand that consumers have a tendency to follow the trends that famous influencers create; influencer marketing becomes the core strategy to improve companies' performances. Noticeably, in the past decade where the use of social media has been blossoming more than ever before, the impact which influencers have on consumers, especially young adults, is at an immense level (Sudha M and Dr. Sheena K. 2017, 18).

The circle of consumers' buying decision is illustrated in figure 6.

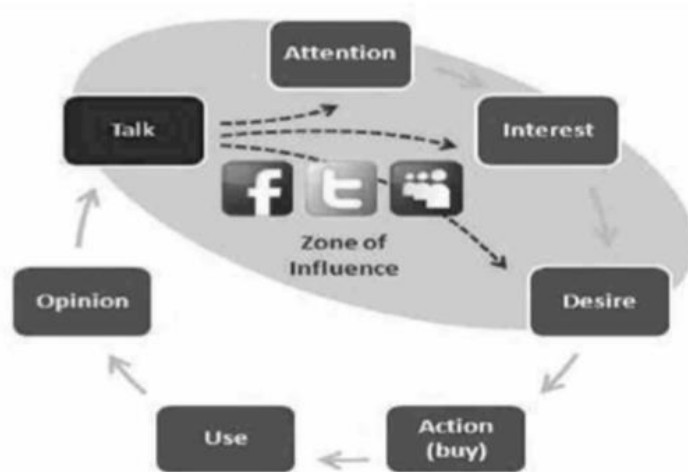


Figure 6 How Social Influencers influence in the fashion industry (Sudha M and Dr. Sheena K. 2017)

Discussing Vietnam's fashion media industry in an interview with Vietcetera Online Newspaper back in April 2019, Dzung Yoko, who works as a Fashion Creative Director of Elle Magazine in the local area for the past eight years, shared about the changes occurred in the fashion media industry compared to three years ago. He stated that the fashion industry has been through significant changes during the past few years, that it was thanks to the advanced internet and social platforms, a great number of artists' work, concepts and trends originating from different places in the world had the opportunities to be issued and updated on a daily basis. Dzung Yoko mentioned that the chances offered from social media allowed content creators like himself to broaden his experience, and at the same time to innovate

oneself to strive harder for the future of the industry. The Director continues on complimenting the working ethics and attitude of the young Vietnamese within the industry had improved considerably in the recent years, more professional to strive for mastery. He ended by stating that this was a positive signal for the fashion industry at times of integration (Vietcetera: Dzung Yoko thoughts on the Fashion Media Industry, 2019).

5. MILLENNIALS

Ever since the second half of the twentieth century, until the present, humans are classified into different succeeding generations base on the context of society. Society develops throughout the years and is adopted, respectively, by the existence of The Silent Generation (Traditionalists), Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and the latest generation – Centennials (Generation Z). Each generation is shaped by periodical elements, mainly related to parenting, economic situation, and technology (The Center for Generational Kinetics, 2019). There have been many researchers stating different years on the beginning and ending years of Millennials (Figure 6). In this paper, the author will examine the aspects of Millennials born between 1980 – 2000.

No	Author/year	Millennials (birth period)
1	Valentine & Powers (2013)	1977 - 1996
2	Muda, Mohd, & Hassan (2016)	1980's to the early 1990's
3	Omar (2016)	1980-1990's
4	Lissitsa & Kol (2016)	1980-1999
5	Moore (2012)	1982-2000
6	Rainer & Rainer (2011)	1980-2000
7	Lee & Kotler (2016)	1980-2000
8	Junker, Walcher, & Blazek (2016)	1981-1995
9	Ordun (2015)	1981-2000
10	Howe & Strauss (2000)	1982-1988

Figure 7 Millennials birth period (International Journal of Marketing Studies, 2017)

5.1 Characteristics

Born from the emerging era of technology, millennials, known as Generation Y, matured gradually with the name of Digital Natives, rather than Digital Immigrants, which is more suitable referring to the former generations. (Marc Prensky, 2001). This aspect has been influencing the characteristics of Millennials since technology in general and the internet in particular have become the most vital factors in the life of young adults. Specifically, communications through social networks has replaced direct contact and interaction between millennials due to convenience. (Pew Research Center, 2012). While it is considered a positive matter on the development and usefulness of technology and the internet, Generation Y has been causing concerns on the heavy use of digital devices. The ability and frequency of communicating face-to-face has decreased creating the personality features of this generation regarding emotions, activities, reflectance, and personal and social values, eventually effecting the world economy in multiple aspects, both positively and negatively (Immordino – Yang M.H. et al., 2012).

Back from the 1960s to the 1970s, Generation X experienced tougher living conditions, especially in Vietnam, during times of the Civil Rights Movement and The Vietnam War where people had to protest for their own rights and wishes to abolish wars. (The 1960s History: Counterculture and Civil Rights Movement, 2010). Parents from this generation eventually wanted to create a better growing

environment for the children from Generation Y with safer and higher living standards. As society developed in wealth from the near end of the twentieth century, millennials became increasingly aspiring and desirous for success. Therefore, people classified as Generation Y are image-driven and have a solid feeling of entitlement. (NAS Insights, 2006).

In addition to the name Digital Natives, Millennials are conceptualized as ‘The Generation of Anxiety, stating the personal situation of the young millennials today (Gander K., 2018). Owing to the pressure of being the first generation to mature with the Internet and Social Media, Millennials experience harsh observations from their parents (Markowicz K., 2016). Compared to the previous generations, the common features of Generation Y include being born in families with fewer children, better financial situations and time management. Hence, the pressure to succeed of Millennials has increased significantly (Strauss E., 2019).

Social media is considered one of the factors shaping the personality along with the anxiety of Millennials. Living in a digital-oriented era, Generation Y is overloaded with trends and influences, they feel the need to be able to update information about the surrounding networks. Thus, the people in this generation have a tendency to feel disappointed and insecure when comparing themselves to other individuals. In other words, Millennials do not feel satisfied with what they own (Curley C., 2019). This is where Millennials use social media to affect the global economy.

Overall, according to NAS Insights, the personality features of Generation Y can be summarized as: Millennials lack patience as they fully developed with the digital society, and rapid fulfillment and satisfaction. Due to the fact that Millennials have been raised in the technological era with multiple of fraudulent acts from the media, the level of skepticism rises accordingly. As mentioned in above on the level of entitlement, millennials concentrate greatly on self-image and how others perceive their position, creating the desire of proving oneself. Despite the negative aspects affected by the changing social context since birth, Millennials own numerous positive characteristics which differentiate this generation from the rest. Firstly, people from Generation Y have excellent abilities to adjust to new environments. Secondly, being Digital Natives, millennials are knowledgeable in technological area.

Moreover, this generation consists of fast and eager learners. Therefore, millennials have the skills and aptitudes to help educate the former generations regarding the latest information (NAS Insights, 2006).

5.2 Buying Behavior

According to a global-wide research published by Roland Berger Agency in an attempt to decode Generation Y, Millennials are undeniably the trendsetters and fastest-consuming generation of all times. Millennials are the most anticipated individuals to discuss, consume, appraise, and offer endorsement along with recommendation to brands (Berger R., 2019).



Figure 8 Purposes of using smartphones from global Millennials (Roland Berger Agency, June 2019)

When referring to Millennials, members of this generation have distinct features relating to their buying behavior. Millennials have a tendency to observe others among their age to evaluate the value and eligibility of the items before purchasing them. These individuals focus on the visual aspects of businesses on social media, along with customization services, competitive product pricing and shipping (Smith, 489-499, 2011). In the society where technology is dominating the routines of young people, communication travels quickly. The fact that Millennials have easy access to the Internet and the ability to comprehend information worldwide in a short period of time is a challenge to brands as they can be disinterested as fast. Hence, brands which successfully gain Generation Y's attention and time are those with powerful brand value, social influences and decent presence of services (Wey-

land, 439-445, 2011). Businesses which have attracted millennials in the past decades vary from Beauty & Cosmetics, Clothing, Jewelry, Entertainment, Sport-related Products to Health Nourishment Products. In the digital era, these businesses have switched the focus on performances on social network sites with quick, straightforward, as well as candid messages to abolish the distances between the brands – customers relationship and to interact closely with the Millennials consumers around the world. Mass media advertising is not the favorable method to Generation Y as they rather consult their networks for evaluations and recommendations. Furthermore, eWOM is a desirable technique which brands advocate to reach these consumers' interests (Valentine and Powers, 596-606, 2013). A report published by the National Retail Federation has shown that Millennials value friends and family opinions before making a purchasing decision. Besides the fact that the young generation is busier during the day and their constant use of online shopping, in-store experience matters. Consequently, millennials consider fast checkout as an element effecting the buying decision (Square, Inc. 2019).

It is predicted that by 2020, millennials' average income will surpass Generation X and become that most influential generation to businesses worldwide (Roland Berger, Decoding Gen Y, 2019). Noticeably, Generation Y earnings and spending behavior are directly proportional to each other. In contrast to the previous generations, millennials are more conscious of their buying ability and influences. Purchasing has not been about supporting brands only; it is a way for these young adults to prove their value and identity. The ability to be knowledgeable of the newest trends and information has created an advantage for Millennials to become experts in the field which they are interested in. Nevertheless, it is also a disadvantage for businesses as brands are operating in a competitive market where new trends and products are introduced on a daily basis. This creates difficulty for brands to establish loyalty with the consumers. In the case of millennials, the average period of obtaining loyalty is approximately half a year (Ordun, 1-16, 2015).

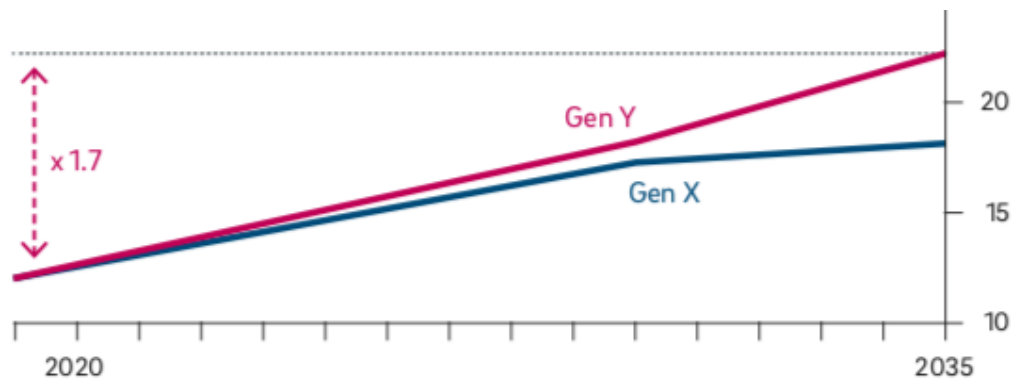


Figure 9 Forecast Gen X and Gen Y Annual Income 2020-2035 (Roland Berger Agency, June 2019)

Advertising is an immortal part of marketing as it remains one of the most applicable methods to convey brands messages and promote products. According to a research by Rahman, Millennials are more interested in advertisements that carry social benefit. The people from this generation would like to build brand value and brand image with the business. Moreover, on a personal context, Millennials tend to prefer advertisements with discounts instead of plain advertising. (Rahman, 121-132, 2015). As a part of the influential generation, the level of engagement from Millennials with businesses on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are overwhelming compared to the other generations. Millennials purchasing decisions depend significantly on self-identity (Junker, Walcher, Blazek, 2016).

Despite the positive features that Generation Y offers to the businesses' performances, it is this generation that provokes the theory called 'cool consumption' developed by Francis and Burgess. Specifically, the 'cool consumption' from Millennials stimulates the strong requirement and demand for unauthentic products. Through the past years, influencers with large number of followers on the social media platforms have been succeeding in demonstrating their level of wealth and social identities by purchasing from and representing luxury brands. Millennials in general are sensitive to trends and are ambitious enough to follow the steps of these influencers. However, it is becoming more about proving their value and receiving attention from their peers rather than about being advocates for brands. Hence, it has created a critical situation of selling unauthentic products that copied luxury brands with a lower price range. The purpose of these illegal activities is to serve

the need of Millennials to demonstrate their expensive image and raise their online status. Millennials view the consumption of both authentic and unauthentic products as a ‘cool’ way of illustrating personal values (Burgess, Francis & Lu, 2015).

5.3 Media Usage

As businesses realize the key characteristic which creates the differences distinguishing millennials from the rest of the world is their knowledge and usage of technology in general, and social media in particular, digital platforms do not deprive each other’s position. Contrastingly, these channels serve as alternate tools to leverage multiple aspects of an existing business.

Compared to other generations, millennials access a more diversified number of digital communication channels. Particularly, this part of the population does not focus on one digital content. Millennials aim their approach to multiple media platforms during the day. In other words, digital services are a part of their daily lives. (Nielsen, 2017). According to a research on social media use by generation, millennials, along with Generation Z, are shown to be the average vanguards of five most common social media platforms including Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and Twitter (Visual Capitalists, Viens, 2019).



Figure 10 Percentage of internet users on visited platforms (Viens, 2019)

To define millennials’ use of media – the topic which has been gathering significant attention and argument, Generation Y is considered the instrument to measure changes in the spectrum of technology (Ofcom, 2013). It is stated that older people have a tendency to follow the younger part of the society to observe how the world is functioning with technology (Lenhart, 188, 2010). She continues by suggesting that the under-30s millennials are the leaders of the internet era. Regardless of one’s

occupation, young adults' interest and concentration on the use of social media elucidates the way this generation is steering the media-filled societies (Botteril, Breddin, and Dun, 539, 2015).

In the perspective of businesses, Millennials are proved to be the most efficient group among four existing generations to have influences on brands performance (Visualizing Capitalists, Viens, 2019).

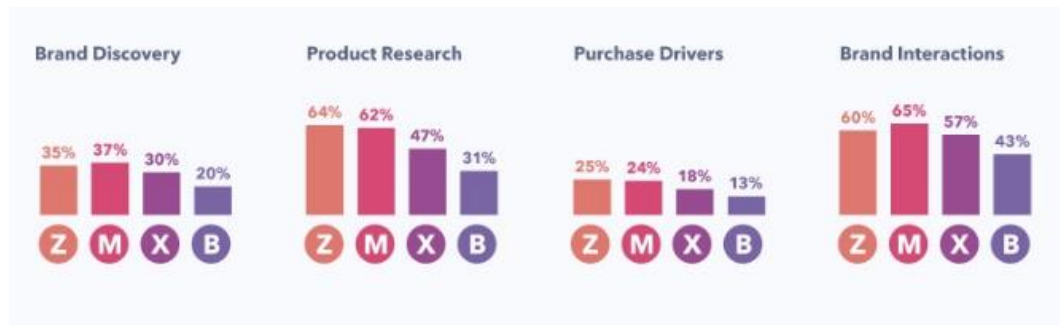


Figure 11 Influential Social Channels' Users on a global scale (Viens, 2019).

In Vietnam, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, one of the two most progressive cities in the country, the use of social media in networking and communicating rise to the top of the Daily Smartphone Usage chart. Therefore, it is advisable that brands adopt these statistics to improve their businesses' performances (Appota, 2018).

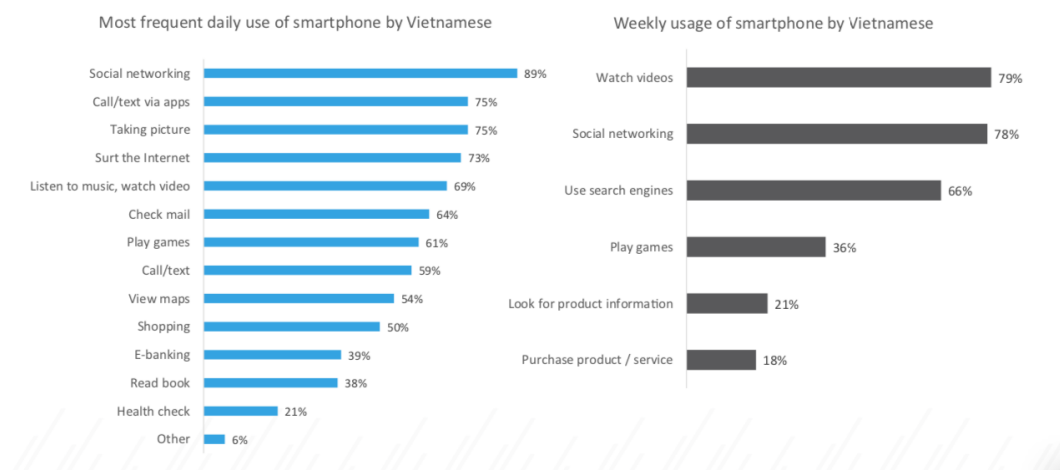


Figure 12 Google Consumer Barometer in Vietnam (2017)

The findings indicated that Millennials use social media as tools to provide opinions and feedback about the products they purchased and communicate to brands. It has proved to be a fact that their experiences as consumers on E-commerce channels

affect the opinions expressed on social media. Millennials aged from 18 to 35 occupied 82% of the Vietnamese E-commerce market with Ho Chi Minh City leading this part of the retail and service sector (Appota, 2018).

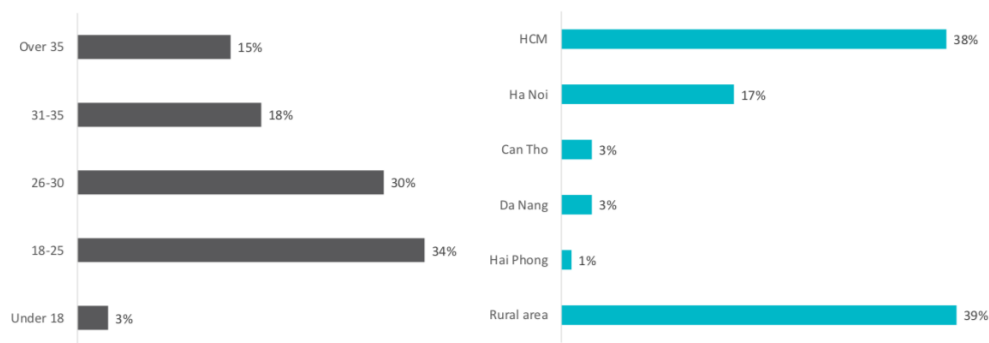


Figure 13 Mobile Online Demographic (2017)

Vietnam has proven to be a technology savvy area, especially in Ho Chi Minh City. The country is showing rising development in adopting smartphone usage and high-pitched media intake (Appota, 2018).

6. INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCER MARKETING TO INCREASE BRAND AWARENESS

In the previous chapters the study discussed the millennials' current media usage and their level of preference on the modern social media models. In this chapter, the integration of social media and influencer marketing will be discussed to provide a total view on this new strategy that brands have been endorsing. Before focusing on the combination mentioned above, an overview on the past media methods is described to better illustrate the development of the digital era through decades.

6.1 Traditional media versus new media

To compare traditional media with new media without stating any biased opinions or aspects, it is important to examine the facet called 'interactivity' of the two methods. While with the traditional media, consumers are passively approached with a rectilinear dimension of information, modern media makes it possible for consumers to handle the information facultatively. In other words, consumers have the

power to control which stage of the advertisements they want to inquire (Bezjian-Avery, Calder, Iacobucci, 1998). With the development of modern technology, interactive media platforms have successfully gathered consumers' attention and usage, leaving traditional media with limited number of advertising channels that required higher budgets and investments (Berte & Bens, 2008). Simply put, it is comparatively less expensive to produce and consume the content from new media as their main feature is to convey messages rapidly (Ogidi & Utulu, 65-66, 2016).

The new media offers consumers various communication formats allowing users to have open and quick access to any type of information, along with the power to share and converse about the content with other users (Hanson et al., 585-607, 2010).

To explain more about the choice of consumers to adopt modern media rather than eradicating them from the society to maintain the use of mass media, I will discuss the 'Cultivation Theory' created by professor George Gerbner in 1976 and later developed with Larry Gross during 1986.

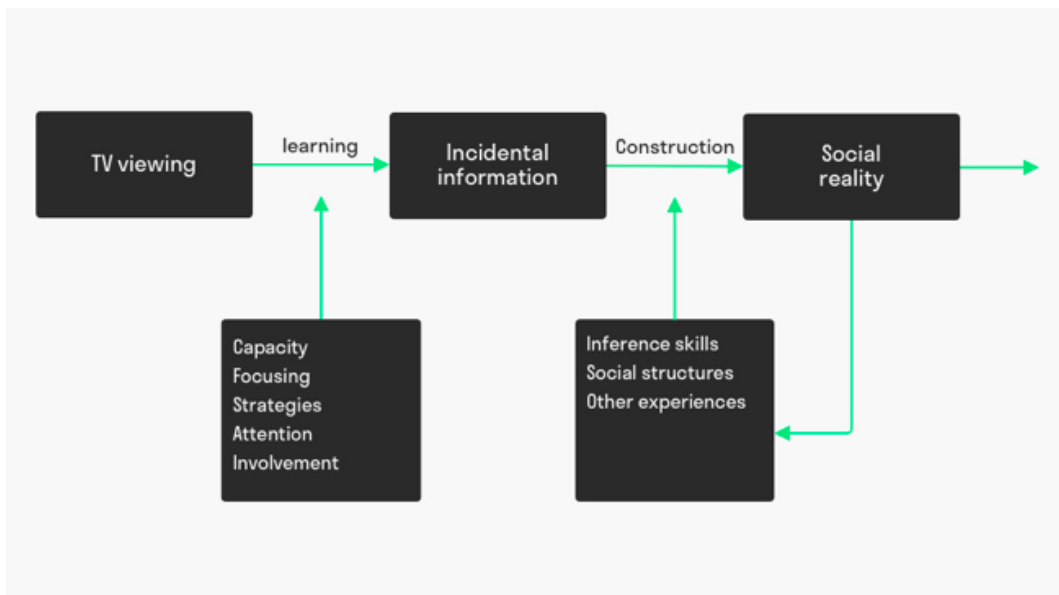


Figure 14 Cultivation Theory (Mulder P. developed map 2019)

The theory overall discusses the great effect of television, as a form of mass communication, on viewers. Gerbner argues that the content of television shaped ITS viewers' perspectives and concepts about the real society. Viewers are gradually affected by the information presented on television. The theorist classifies viewers

into two groups: heavy viewers and light viewers. The level of impact which influenced the viewers depends on the amount of time a person spends watching television. The influence that this mass medium provides would slowly change viewers' conceptualizations, attitudes, and behaviour. Consequently, a subculture is created by the manipulation of television.

The heavy viewers, the main focus being of the Cultivation Theory, they are described with the tendency to be more prone to the contents and programmes which support his or her outlooks. In addition, heavy users are most likely to suffer from anxiety due to the manipulated information on the screen, which does not completely reverberate the reality outside. Contrastingly, light viewers are more open-minded by cultivating many sources and programmes with various views on the world based on both television and other types of media. Generally, their opinions and ideas about society is less negative and narrow-minded than that of heavy viewers (Gerbner & Gross, 17-40, 1986).

Throughout the process of urbanization, television has served as an indispensable part of humans' daily lives, providing news, information, knowledge, and entertainment. However, the heavy use of television as a linear presentation of the world has formed an unhealthy conceptualization and living style. Television has built a certain comprehension on the society and impelled unrealistic ideas affecting how people discern each other. To put it another way, the attitudes and behavior of a person is directly involved with the content presented to them (Mulder, 2019).

From the explanation of the Cultivation Theory and the advantages of modern media listed above, I suggest that, with modern media and the rise of interactivity concept, people are in control with the amount of information they can perceive and the level of exposedness to the same linear views of the world is somewhat reduced.

6.2 Social media impact on Marketing

Through mass sources regarding the digital era and social media impact from multiple researchers, the heightened demand of digital marketing is undeniable, especially on a global scale. This section will analyze the way influencer marketing works by taking full advantage of the rise of social media.

6.2.1 The operation of influencer marketing

To be able to create a successful campaign using influencer marketing, companies are required to invest in detailed planning and discussion. By depending on the digital marketing industry, influencer marketing's initial priority is outlining the group of targeted audience. Companies narrowing down the chosen audience means it would be easier to identify the suitable influencers for the project based on the level of relevance of each influencer to the audience, in this case, Millennials, the campaign can convey the message to the followers (KI, 3, 2019).

The first step in the creation of an influencer marketing project is to establish a relationship with the influencers. It can be a brand – customer relationship to a business deal depending on the strategy of each company. Developing close relationships and insights business opportunities with influencers gives companies access to the influencers' customer base and leverages the value of the brands as in most viewers' perceptions, the influencer is the face of the products and the brands (Tap Influence, 5-6, 2015)

The importance of the success of influencer marketing depends on the network of both the influencers and the followers. When executing a campaign with an influencer, the brands will expect to receive interest and attention from the list of followers of the influencers and the inner network range of the audience, such as family, friends and acquaintances. The result from this campaign will eventually help pushing the sale figures.

Before publishing the collaboration between the brands and the influencers, the two parties ought to discuss carefully the process and the expectation of the results, as well as the preparations of special circumstances. This is due to the possible lack of knowledge from the influencers to the brands and their intentions. Influencers may control a massive stimulus of customers' behaviorism and perception, however, they do not own the equivalent cognizance regarding the brands' blueprint (Biaudet, 16-17, 2017).

According to the 27 in-depth interviews executed by Professor Audrezet and Professor Kerviler with influencers in the fashion and cosmetics industry, influencers are becoming more professional and highly aware of the brands' value in the hope of becoming brands' business partner. The interviews conclude that smart companies will treat the influencers as the brands' messengers rather than mere advertising means. For instance, fashion retailer ASOS reveals that the company views partnered influencers as one of the centers of their brand building strategies. ASOS puts effort into choosing the right messengers and advocating them as insiders of the brand. Additionally, the chosen influencers have a variety of fashion styles and physical conformations. The fashion retailer disclosed their result concerning their social media followers, with a growth of 77.000 followers from 123.000 to 200.000 in a period of 12 months. The two authors shared that influencer marketing is a complex individualistic process and requires mutual trust between the two parties (Audrezet A. & Kerviler G., 2019).

In Vietnam, micro influencers are proven to be the better choice compared to celebrities concerning social influencer marketing. Micro influencers are users with 10.000 to 100.000 followers on social sites. They have a tendency to post contents involving hobbies and one's specialization on the media. Moreover, micro influencers have higher equivalent connection between number of followers and data of interactions. This feature is valuable for marketers to examine their existing level of reputation. In addition to the fact that micro influencers have a stronger influence level to Millennials on social media more than celebrities, their remunerations are partially lower in comparison. Therefore, micro influencers are becoming the more favorable option for multiple campaigns from different sizes of brands (Advertising Vietnam, 2019).

6.2.2 Social Media and Influencer Marketing as a trending tool

The usefulness of Social Media has escaped the mere limitation of daily contact between family and friends. Along with the shift of the digital era, social media has encountered a major milestone in the marketing industry where users are able to get in-depth information on the brands and their offerings with several clicks. By taking advantage of this crucial transformation, brands are continuously finding methods

to derive potential benefits from their social network sites (Paquette, 4, 2013). Companies have been aiming to increase brand awareness and boost sales by utilizing the developments of search engines on mobile devices in early years of the digital age. Today, online social network sites have expanded companies' structure and capacity to procure consumers' attention through commencing touch points (Shankar, Inman, Mantrala, Kelley, and Rizley, 2011).

According to a report by We are social, in 2018 alone, the number of social media users increased 13% compared to the previous year with the number of 3397 billion users. Consequently, Influencer Marketing has followed the rise of social media around the world, making it the fastest growing genre in the advertising industry with the anticipated market share of 5-10 billion USD in 2020.

Advertising Vietnam has shared a recent research regarding how consumers react to different marketing methods. It was stated that 90% of consumers believe in suggestions recommended by experts or people whom they trust, while only 33% believe in traditional advertising. Additionally, approximately 94% of marketers admitted that influencer marketing brought efficient results regarding their media campaigns. Statistically, influencer marketing can create ROI eleven times higher than traditional methods. (Advertising Vietnam, 2019)

Overall, to optimize social media as a marketing tool, marketers ought to master its different changing faces. By grasping the rising fundamental trends in the influencer marketing industry, brands have the ability to successfully prepare and execute future campaigns. Initially, from simply gaining information and knowledge online, people are gradually taking control of technology by producing and absorbing, therefore, increasing value to the platforms that allow them to perform (Campbell, Pitt & Parent, 87-102, 2011).

7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the theoretical aspects of the two methodology - Quantitative Methodology and Qualitative Methodology and indicates which technique is chosen to examine the theoretical findings of the thesis. Additionally, the researcher will discuss details about the process of collecting the data.

7.1 Research approach

In quantitative research, the data collected vary as numerical in order to obtain a more comprehensive appearance on the discussed field. The data are presented in the number format where people choose their favorable options in instruments such as questionnaire, survey, and observations check list. The purpose of this technique is to explore and inspect the relationship among different variables such as independent, dependent variables, and extrinsic. In qualitative research, the data collected are mainly from individuals' words, obtained from interviews, or academic documents such as scientific journals or newspapers. Moreover, the results can be collected through audiovisuals and video observations. When executing this technique, the researcher performs as an instrument by conducting interviewing sessions, collecting observation rather than depending on surveys. The main objective is to investigate people's including experts' experience in the field, and their perception on the matters. (Creswell J.W., 2009).

In addition, Johnson B. & Christensen L. (2008) and Lichtman M. (2006) summarize the context differences between the two methodology as follow:

Criteria	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Focus	Wide-angle lens; examines the breadth & depth of phenomena.	Narrow-angle lens; tests a specific hypotheses.
Nature of Observation	Study behavior in a natural environment.	Study behavior under controlled conditions; isolate causal effects.
Nature of Reality	Multiple realities; subjective.	Single reality; objective.
Final Report	Narrative report with contextual description & direct quotations from research participants.	Statistical report with correlations, comparisons of means, & statistical significance of findings.

Figure 15 Johnson B. & Christensen L. (2008) and Lichtman M. (2006) summary of differences on the two methodology via Xavier University Library (2012).

In the empirical study for this thesis, the qualitative methodology is executed. The purpose of selecting the chosen technique is to obtain insights views and deeper perceptions (Chalhoub-Deville M. & Deville C., 211-224, 2008) of the strategy social media and influencer marketing combined. Instead of conducting surveys and received the data similarly to those published on the internet or newspaper, the researcher aims to give readers a more unfamiliar opinions derived from individual experts working in the field of fashion. The purpose of the empirical study is to capture individuals' amply structured experience and reflective comments, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined as 'the human as instrument'. Additionally, the qualitative methodology is well-known as 'thick-descriptive' due to the affluence of the discussion, not depending on a list of limited questions, forced-choice answers with mainly close-ended responses (Jackson L.R. et al., 21-28, 2007). This method allows the researcher to explore the cultural perspectives of the individuals' inner experience (Corbin J. & Strauss A., 2008). Therefore, the researcher finds the qualitative methodology suitable to implement on the thesis.

7.2 Research Design

In order to analyze the data collected using the qualitative methodology, the interview contents will focus on the interviewees' perceptions and experiences in the field, specifically on how they have been experiencing the integration aspects of influencer marketing on social media. Due to geographical impediment with the

interviewer's location being Vaasa, Finland and the interviewees' location being HCMC, Vietnam, the interviews will be executed virtually through audio calls and emails. The reason behind the arrangement to conduct five email interviews and only two audio calls is the busy schedules of the interviewees. Since the topic of the thesis revolves around social media and fashion influencers, it is rational to invite participants from the actual industry, who are well-known and frequently occupied with their working schedules. By executing the interviews through audio calls and emails, the interviewer can develop the questions and send the questions beforehand, and the interviewees are able to answer the questions at their own convenience without being interrupted or disturbed by noises because of time and place independence (Opdenakker R., 2006). Additionally, the possibility of spontaneous answer will be reduced because interviewing through emails gives the interviewees more time to comprehend the questions and give reflective answers (Bampton R. & Cowton J.C., 2002).

The questionnaire is formulated to follow the research topic and eventually guide the researcher to answer the research questions, which relates to the experts' view on the journey of integrating social media and influencer marketing in the fashion industry in HCMC, Vietnam. Additional amendments were made in the questionnaires to suit the influencers' occupations.

7.3 Data collection

The interview questionnaires were first designed in English to preserve the academic connection between the theoretical findings and the empirical study. Afterwards, the interviewees were inquired on their choice of answering the questionnaires in English or Vietnamese based on individual's preference. For the convenience of the interviewees whose first language is Vietnamese and second language is English, two versions of the questionnaires in the two languages were sent to provide the interviewees with flexible choices. The overall purpose is to create a sense of comfort for the interviewees, allowing them to be able to answer in either language.

To qualify the empirical study, I was able to invite seven experts in the fashion industry located in HCMC. As the interviewer, I scheduled the required time frame

for the email interviews and settled agreements on the deadline for the answers of questionnaires, which was four days. The researcher sent the questionnaires in the Word file to the provided emails of the interviewees. The received answers which are expressed in Vietnamese are translated to English while maintaining the individual's core ideas and opinions. Subsequently, the answers from seven experts will be utilized for the data analysis.

8. DATA ANALYSIS

Seven industry insiders were introduced to the topic and agreed on participating in the empirical research. The insiders will be introduced along with their working positions and level of relevance in the industry.

The first interviewee is Hanh Dinh, who has years of experience in many positions in the fashion industry. Ms. Hanh used to work as a Social Media and Styling Intern at Love Clothing, PR Executives at Leinné Brand, Co-Founder & Co-Owner at Mode:On Retail in HCMC. Throughout the years of working in the related fields, Hanh Dinh has obtained in-depth experience and understanding in the Fashion and Social Media spectrum. The second interviewee, Quynh Vu, is currently working as a Marketing Executive at Eugene Saigon Shopping and Retail, one of the most valued local fashion brands chosen by Millennials in HCMC. Thu Nguyen, the third interviewee, works as a Digital Marketing Executive for Leinné Brand, and has experienced in creating visualize contents on the brand's Instagram and coordinating fashion events which involved working with the industry's influencers and celebrities, for instance, the Leinné Brand's State of Raw private event in HCMC. The fourth expert, Mai Nguyen, is the digital marketing assistant of Viet Trang Handicraft. Mai Nguyen offers her contribution to the research with the experience in the content marketing market of Millennials. The fifth interviewee is Tuyet Nguyen, who is working as a Digital Content Creative Assistant for Us The Basic Retail and Shopping in HCMC with approximately 350.000 followers on Instagram. Yu Duong, the sixth interviewee, is currently one of the most well-known actresses and influencers during the last several years with her sense of fashion and daily contents on social media. Yu Duong has attracted around 90.000 followers on her lifestyle

and fashion contents collaborating with many local clothing brands and photographers in HCMC. The last interviewee, Tam Nguyen, as known as Mia Soya, is widely known among Millennials and Generation Z social media users for her positive image and messages. Tam Nguyen has gained approximately 240.000 followers on Instagram for her role as a Lifestyle Influencer, Model, MC, and Actress. She has recently starred in Vietnam's most anticipated 2019 movie premiere 'Mat Biec' directed by director Victor Vu. In the empirical research, the seven interviewees' opinions on the interview questionnaires will be analyzed in summaries according to the themes gathered in the answers. The individual respondent's answers will not be introduced in a way that could be connected to a specific respondent.

The data analysis will be divided into three parts. Each part is related to the theoretical findings at a certain degree. The analysis begins with a question, continues with the summaries of answers given by the interviewees and concluded with an analysis.

8.1 Social Media and Influencer Marketing strategy in the Fashion Business

In this section, I will demonstrate the empirical result on the impact of social media platforms and influencer strategy, specifically in the fashion industry.

8.1.1. How Social Media is essential to a fashion brand in HCMC

Firstly, the study begins by examining the importance of Social Media and Influencer Marketing to local fashion brands in HCMC through the opinions of the interviewed insiders. It is reported all seven interviewees provide similar points of view on the matter, stating that the level of essentiality of social media to clothing brands is significantly high. Social media is an inevitable part of a fashion brand in times when every consumer owns at least one social media site such as Facebook or Instagram. Therefore, it is safe to state that social media is the new Word of Mouth (WOM). Nowadays, people, especially Millennials are becoming more dependent on social media. This affects the way people, approach and comprehend new trends. It was suggested that a successful fashion brand could not aim at youths without a media presence in the current times as social media has grew to become the most dominant portal of information. With HCMC's growing local fashion

scene, there is a significant amount of retailing alternatives. Social media helps the audience to control what they wish to pursue. In turn, brands can manipulate their social presence to express their concepts and values to the followers. It can be concluded that social media shows great influence on brand's marketing strategy, especially in the modern HCMC's fashion market. It plays a key role in conveying the messages and brand values through images and contents.

8.1.2. Doing business through Instagram with visibility

Among multiple social media platforms, Instagram is reported to have the highest number of brands and users in HCMC regarding the fashion market. Instagram focuses on conveying messages and contents through images or videos, similar to the concepts that many fashion brands have been optimizing. Instagram is designed to focus on visual, hence, it is easy to understand that fashion businesses who require significant visual content can develop on this platform to express their aesthetic sense. According to industry insiders, there are around 25 million companies that use Instagram as a strategic platform to connect with consumers, especially for small businesses. They can take advantage of the features offered by Instagram to leverage the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and increase brand recognition.

Overall, social media is seen as a lifeline for products and services dependent on visibility, and Instagram was created as a platform that specifically emphasizes displaying visuals in an effective manner. The effectiveness can be defined as, firstly, a navigable feature – Instagram has a simple structure and is highly mobile device friendly; secondly, the efficiency is demonstrated with the hashtags feature helping the users to browse photos instantly. Clothing and influencers' posts are then arranged to be compact and are dictated to one ratio of picture per post; thirdly, it is dominant. Instagram is the current well-known and widely used social medium for commercial use with its built-in shopping tools and business-tailored page options. Therefore, consumer traffic is proven to be the highest amongst other platforms with similar functions such as Pinterest and Tumblr.

8.1.3. Role of influencers have towards Millennial consumers in Marketing

Following to the target audience, insiders share their view on the role which influencers play in the fashion market towards Millennials. In recent years, one could state that influencers are the style director for Millennials. One of the most shared opinions between the interviewees is the connection built by influencers. Specifically, influencers create a bridge between brands and consumers. While celebrities are often thought of as unapproachable and ‘unreal’, influencers are more interactive. To millennial consumers, influencers are not only the ones representing a group with similar passions, hobbies, concerns, or problems. They are seen as reliable individuals. Considering today’s market situation, people tend to neglect advertisement on television. As consumers’ awareness rises, the role of influencer in product marketing becomes more vital as well. Influencers motivate the consumers from their buying intention to the actual behavior. One of the experts shared that as an influencer, she enjoyed following other influencers and having granted access to brands through them. Societies are developing fast in ways that is difficult and challenging to comprehend, and there are many concepts and different cultures existing at the same time. Those values are widely known and accepted by millennial consumers, thanks to the Internet. The people in this age range are the main target of local brands that do not only access what mostly over social media, but also have the ability to afford the clothing items advertised on them. Among this 'uneasy' society, social media is the tool for consulting and developing oneself by exploring the suitable community with similar interests and fashion tastes through influencers and brands on the internet. Noticeably, the term “influencer” is born out of a need – the need to define users with particular social media patterns which have significant impact on other’s usage patterns and, consequentially, “lifestyle” (in this context, it could be understood as aesthetic and consumerist choices). Influencers, through self-representation on media platforms, create trends and orient their audience towards a lifestyle similar with theirs. On the one hand, should brands’ products be chosen by influencers and incorporated into these lifestyles, there is a high chance their followers will purchase these items in order to pursue that lifestyle. On the other hand, brands can hire influencers with lifestyles corresponding to the one they are trying to promote to reach this cultivated audience. Either way, influencers

serve as a gateway for products or brands to get through to a particular group following their usage pattern.

8.1.4. Criteria to engage the consumers as social media users

With the implementation of Influencer Marketing in social media, there are certain criteria which need to be identified to attract the attention of the consumers. The insiders shared the same criteria regarding the quality of an influencer marketing project. Individualism is the current trend for all consumerist items. The more one can enhance their identity with a product, the better the chances of that product selling. Incorporating influencers into marketing campaigns on social media essentially gives the campaigns more individuality and heightens productivity by focusing on the following aspects. Firstly, the seven interviewees emphasized on the importance of visuality. It was suggested that imagery is the fastest travelling and most effective tool of sales currently, hence, the better oriented the visuals of a marketing campaign are, from the actual product to the execution of the photoshoot for that product and the final layout of the campaign, the higher the chances of success at creating an identity that consumers want to engage with. Influencers can shape these campaigns to their own image, which appeals to a responding audience. Secondly, it is the content of the campaign. Written content is another key factor in creating and expressing the brand's identity. Additionally, each influencer has a particular way of speech with which they can tailor a campaign to, such as how they use imagery. Thirdly, it is the benefits gained from the campaign. One of the insiders shared her views on this particular aspect. It is a highly personalized form of marketing - influencer discounts and giveaways. These campaigns are highly individualistic, often including different types of games or challenges, and they are conducted by people considered leaders in the followers' lifestyle communities. These activities are particularly designed to gauge engagement from the audience. Moreover, it is advisable to identify the target audience in detail. In summary, fashion businesses ought to focus on trending visuals, contents and beneficial aspects in order to gain consumers' attention on a specific collection. Furthermore, marketing as a whole should be considered as a way to explore and understand the consumers in the market.

8.1.5. Influencer Marketing as the fastest growing strategy in the fashion business

In this subchapter, I will examine whether Influencer Marketing is the fastest-growing strategy in the fashion industry during this era by gathering the opinions of the experts on this topic. The experts expressed similar viewpoints on the question to a certain degree. In the digital innovation 4.0 era, brands do not decide the success of their products alone; the results depend on the consumers. They are not only more active in shopping, but also in the process of creating the product, from forming the products' idea to the execution phases. The consumers are the main influenced subjects of the influencers. Influencers act as a bridge between brands and consumers. Influencers are the voice of consumers, as well as the place where brands deliver their message. The fact that brands are marketing through influencers has existed for a long period of time. It is extremely understandable as followers tend to show interest in the items which their influencers are using. In the previous decades when social media was not widely used, brands were already collaborating with celebrities such as singers, actors, models, athletes to promote their products. As for now, the growth of social media has created more opportunities to connect globally, allowing the consumers to discover the brands through influencers. It is true to say that Influencer Marketing is the fastest growing strategy. However, there is still another aspect of Influencer Marketing. In certain situations, it is described as a double-edged sword, and if not wielded properly, could create rough consequences for the business. Since Influencer Marketing depends closely on aligning a brand with an influencer's projected lifestyle – that is to say, projected performance within the time of the campaign heavily depends on the influencer's likeableness towards their immediate audience and the public in general. Should the lifestyle portrayed be infringed by scandals or the likes of them, these campaigns lose their effect altogether. Therefore, it is suggested as crucial to build Influencer Marketing campaigns tentatively and with much consideration in the goals and contingencies of such projects. Overall, it is not completely true that influencer marketing is the most suitable strategy for every brand in the market. It depends on many elements to examine a company's performance, such as company's sale scale, or the target customer segmentation. Noticeably, influencer marketing strategy is suitable for small

businesses, helping them gain more interaction with consumers when their brand recognitions are not high. However, to view this strategy in a stable company with strong reputation, influencer marketing might not be the most favorable or effective method. The conclusion is to examine the companies' status and audience, along with the unexpected risks that might occur during the campaign to decide the most appropriate marketing method.

Finally, at the end of this subchapter, I will examine the reasons on why brands should implement influencer marketing rather than other marketing methods. Firstly, the comparison between two most conducted marketing methods will be presented – influencer marketing and paid advertising. Influencer Marketing works on the basis of trust. Customer believes that the influencers are using and enjoying these products as shown on these campaigns and are therefore more likely to purchase thinking they will enjoy the product as much as the influencer does. Whereas with paid ads, it is obvious that brands are selling a product, removing the individualistic influencer-audience correspondence from the equation. In general, the experts suggest optimizing several marketing methods throughout a brand's marketing journey. When doing business, every company focuses on their return on investment (ROI). Using influencer marketing will cost a specific amount of budget, similar to other marketing methods. Influencer marketing is likely to result in better short-term results to brands' performance. In the long run, brands could execute different marketing strategies, monitor the process and budget of each strategy to decide the best method for each brand. It depends on the sizes of the business.

It can be concluded by stating that brands could take advantage of the existed audience of the influencers with lower market price instead of investing a significant amount into finding groups of consumers based on the wide target that the brands are focusing onto. However, it should not become the only marketing tool existed in the company strategy.

8.2 Collaboration criteria in Influencer Marketing on Social Media

In this subchapter, the thesis will discuss the criteria to possibly form a business relationship between brands and influencers. The criteria were discussed by both

the experts working in fashion brands and the influencers who have had experienced in influencer marketing.

The interviewees generally provided similar criteria to agree on a collaboration contract between two parties. Firstly, the brand must be socially reliable. The contract must create a win-win relationship for two parties. Secondly, it is the degree of relevance. The brand has to own the same developing direction, styles and images as the influencers, and whether if the influencers' lifestyle and concepts are suitable to the brands' images and values. Thirdly, the brand has to create a reasonable proposal of payment, depending on their status as micro-influencers or macro-influencers. Lastly, influencers ought to have a special feeling of adore and connection to the brand itself. One of the experts gave a more in-depth situation in the influencer market that occurred recently by suggesting that several influencers take on invitations A brand offered them without specific standards and qualifications, and others narrow their promotional activities into a particular scope. By taking into consideration criteria such as brand reputation, price tier, product reputation, contesting brands, and aligning them with their current promotions, influencers can create a lasting and effective influence on the audience.

Among multiple of collaboration invitations from brands, there are certain situations which influencers refuse the offer. The answers of the interviewees correspond to each other. Overall, if the brands do not qualify the criteria mentioned above, they are considered not adequate to form a business relationship. On the influencers' viewpoint, each job has an impact on the influencer's personal branding, since the brand is then allocated with the image of the influencer. Hence, should brands be unaligned from this pre-formed image and set of values, influencers need to refuse offers to maintain consistency and trust from their audience.

8.3 Social Media Influencers' role on Millennial consumers

This subchapter will discuss the role and responsibility of the influencers on their followers and the brands' consumers. In addition, the future vision of Influencer Marketing in the fashion industry will be presented based on the opinions of industry insiders.

8.3.1 Influencers' responsibility on their followers' buying behaviors

Firstly, the idea that influencers are partly responsible for the purchasing actions of consumers is examined. On this specific topic, the interviewees express different viewpoints. There are two main ideas which were gathered from the answers of the seven experts. The first opinion is that influencers are responsible for their followers' buying behavior. Followers tend to find the influencers they follow on social media for advice and recommendations on product. In followers' perspectives, influencers are the experts in their field, which make their comments or recommendations trustworthy, and since buying online equals to the fact that followers cannot examine the product themselves, influencers are partly responsible for their followers' buying behavior when they make online purchases. The second opinion involves the influencers not being responsible for the consumers' purchasing activities, which takes the majority agreement between the respondent. Influencers are creating a motivation for consumers to purchase. Rather than the influencers, the brands should be responsible for the quality of the products and services offered to the consumers. Buyers should also have obvious awareness before making the decision. This is directly tied to the audiences' ability to navigate influencer campaigns. Since there are influencers who offer significant effort conducting their work, and several none at all, it is important that the audience are able to distinguish between these two types. In conclusion, the researcher is able to narrow down whether the influencers are responsible for their followers' buying behavior. Influencers are partly responsible with the contents they choose to post on social media. However, influencer advertisement should be considered an opinion, rather than a 100% truthful exposure.

8.3.2 Influencers to be considered role models to Millennials by characteristics

In the following, the role of influencer will be examined by the insiders – whether they should be considered role models to Millennials. Likewise, this question sparks contrasting opinions among the interviewees. The argument that influencers are seen as role models are based on several reasons. Influencers are believed to be the experts in their field concentrating on offering their followers essential information

which they can rely on by studying, working or doing research on their field to expand their knowledge or investing their time on testing all the products before giving any recommendations to their followers. One of the interviewees shared her experience when operating as an actress, having been taught that 'self-image' is important and she agreed with the fact that influencers are role models to Millennials. 'Self-image' is the element deciding which groups of consumers will follow them and be the audience. 'Self-image' will be the representatives when people are discussing about them. The second opinion is that influencers are not and should not be considered role models. Influencers should only be considered as the experienced, the message conveyers with decent reliability. Through sharing their experience with the product and service, or their motivational stories on a daily basis through fine images and unique contents, they provide their followers with information. To neutralize the different opinions of the interviewees, the researcher came to a conclusion that it is by the followers' own perceptions and impression gaining from the influencers. It is suggested that whether influencers are seen as role-models depends on both how they present themselves on social media and the audience's consideration. Therefore, intention and reliability greatly vary in this aspect.

From the image of the influencers in the mind of the consumers mentioned above, the thesis continues to discuss the characteristics of the influencers and whether expressing their true personality online will affect a brand's marketing aspects. It is the general agreed opinion between the experts that there are not specific standards forcing the choice of influencers on this problem. However, if they choose to express their real characteristics online to the followers, influencers should consider the brands' image that they have been collaborating with. The characteristics should not completely be contrast to the brands' values and concepts that they are representing. Overall, in an ideal setting, as influencers are currently an integral part of everyday purchase, influencer should stay truthful and adherent to their personal values. Those values attract an audience that shares them, hence, in this scenario there is no deception of consideration on consequence.

8.3.3 The future of Influencer Marketing in the fashion business

Lastly, the experts were asked to share their visions on the future of Influencer Marketing on social media. The general predictions for this marketing method are optimistic. Specifically, influencers in the fashion industry are creating significant changes. For instance, at Fashion Week events, people do not stay completely concerned about which designs are made from which designers, what stories are behind the designs, or the brands creating them. What consumers care about the Fashion Week is the appearance of the influencers, how they express their strengths through their outfits - which used to be the centre of magazines and consumers' mind, where back then influencers were only the tools to promote them. Influencer Marketing in the fashion industry will be optimized in a smarter way, with the brands and Influencer marketing neutralizing each other, adding values to each other to promote. Along with the development, brands should always keep their own voice, concepts, and spiritual values. One of the experts shared her opinion on the specific state of Fashion Influencer Marketing in the near future, stating that it would develop in another direction. The use of macro-influencers might reduce, leaving more space for the rise of micro-influencers as the current state of influencer market are quite saturated, and the awareness of consumers are increasing. Consumers can view macro-influencers' post as mere sale purpose, which does not show individuality and trustworthiness. Marketing is all about creating trust for consumers. Therefore, micro-influencers and organic influencers will gain more attention as messages can be tailored to a targeted group of users, and consumers can find their level of individual interactions higher than macro-influencers. To summarize, for the foreseeable future, with the ongoing rise of social media, influencers as a crucial part of brand development. Additionally, as users are better adapting to virtual interactions and presentations, only influencers with stable and clear personal branding will maintain a strong career and reap fine benefits for the brands which with they collaborate.

9. CONCLUSION

As the aim of this paper is to examine the impact of social media and influencer marketing on Millennials' buying behavior in HCMC, the conclusion will finalize the outcomes of the thesis, which involves answering the research questions.

- **What role does Social Media have in the life of Millennials?**

Social media has been judiciously maneuvering its way into the life of Millennials during the past years. Whilst it might have begun with basic intention of socially connecting users, it gradually developed and was depicted using more extensive definitions gauging from linking individuals to linking industries. As social media continues to grow, its users are experiencing similar evolution. As 'digital natives', Millennials are experiencing lives online more than any previous generation. Throughout the past decade, social media has been proven to exist in millennials' lives as a revolutionary shift in lifestyle rather than a mere entertainment tool. Different platforms are used as an identity to users. Apart from altering social structures, social media has successfully expanded and influenced education, politics, and business. With that being stated, social media has been maintaining a complex influence on the contemporary society as it impacts different domains in life. In other words, it is a transition toward a modern communication environment.

On average, millennials spend four hours a day on social media (Vina Research, 2018). Social media was originally built to cause addiction since gaining revenue on time, attention, and data from users are the main business model. Therefore, the role of social media in the life of Millennials vary based on the following elements concluded from the theoretical backgrounds and the empirical research:

- Social validation: the number of likes and comments are validations proving people are important and interesting for others' attentions.
- Fear of missing out (FOMO): people are more likely to participate in trending discussions or conversations.
- Social media is the place where ego speaks: 80% of conversations on social media are about oneself, whereas 30-40% were spent on direct offline conversation.
- Cultural competence: People have a high tendency to compare themselves to others around, especially on social media. Social media is a powerful tool linking users,

however, at the same, they create a comparative and competitive culture among participants.

- Personal branding: By expressing one's action, social networks, lifestyles, they are building a foundation on social media. Social media has escaped the basic norm of communication, and instead serves as profiles to maturing Millennials.
- **How has social media and influencer marketing conquered the fashion market in Ho Chi Minh City?**

Social media has grown to become a constituent part of the fashion domain, especially in the marketing activities. Since most reliable businesses postulate on moral and ethical values formed by society, implementation of social networking site is vital to market services and products. Social media has enabled the fashion industry to develop with ebullient content posted and shared between brands, brand's ambassadors, influencers, and consumers globally. Retail and shopping brands are able to permeate into international markets through features on different social media platform. Influencers' followers, likewise, received the contents from the brands through a bridge called influencer marketing. The fashion market in HCMC are occupied by the majority of modern Millennials who are interested in the online displayed 'life' of influencers. Influencer Marketing works on the basis of trust. Customer believes that the influencers are using and enjoying these products as demonstrated on these campaigns and, therefore, have a higher tendency to purchase believing they will have similar enjoyment on the product as much as influencers do. The core essence of social media is constant changing and relies heavily on formalism. Hence, fashion brands are continuously collaborating with micro-influencers and macro-influencers – individuals who obtain the ability to turn clothing items of different genres into trends. At the same time, the context of fashion creates a perspective for consumers into believing that they can become trendsetter by constantly keeping track of influencers' choices. Nowadays, as the impact of influencers rise gradually on the daily basis of Millennials in the fashion domain, clothing items are designed and produced to create a statement about oneself. Social media, influencers' lifestyles, and retailers, together, are the tool to identify Millennials' social values and identity. To describe the Vietnamese's fashion industry,

there are three keywords concluded from the paper, which are: social media driven, competitive, and fast-changing. Chances for fashion brands in HCMC vary since the majority of locals are easily absorbed into social media as a place which converge necessary features to express emotions, personal opinions and statements, update on trends, discuss and purchase. This has allowed both local and international fashion brands in Viet Nam to invest significant budget into Social Media and Influencer Marketing to approach potential consumers and gather higher efficiency than traditional advertising. Through the insights provided by the industry insiders, it has been proven that Social Media and Influencer Marketing have obvious impact on Millennials consumers' buying behavior and the integration strategy has been creating rather positive changes in the fashion field.

10. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity is considered as a discrete concept. The validity of a research represents the level to which the theoretical findings and empirical evidences reinforce the sufficiency and suitability of analysis and actions (Messick S., 6, 1989). Reliability demonstrates the reproducibility and consistency of a research over time (Fraenkel J.K. & Wallen N.E., 2003 via Zohrabi M., 2013). A research is considered reliable when many different researchers are able to use it under substantial conditions, delivering coherent and logical results (McMillan J.H. & Schumacher S., 2001, 2006 via University of Pretoria). Additionally, reliability decides the level of measurement errors in a research as the higher measurement errors appear the lower reliability it obtains (Moss P., 1994).

In regard of the validity and reliability of the thesis, the paper demonstrates literature findings mainly from the recent years, with a minor number of exceptions when it involves essential theoretical backgrounds from experts in the late 90s, which remain widely adopted by researchers nowadays. Furthermore, the researcher uses the primary data collection method for the empirical evidence which was obtained from the interviews with industrial insiders. There were three elements withdrawn from the interviewees, which provide validity for the paper – Generation, Location, and Relatability. The experts invited for the interviewees are Millennials who are

currently residing in HCMC, which is the targeted audience of the thesis AS initially stated. The relatability degree of those individuals involves the year of experience that they have been working in the fashion industry as well as the social media and influencer environment. This proves that the interviewees understand the objective of the thesis and are able to provide logical and highly accurate responses to the questionnaire. Additionally, in comparison, the answers from the interviewees have a level of resemblance, presenting a degree of similarity in perceptions. Hence, provided that researches on this topic appear in the future, the potential of generating the corresponding results can be considerably high.

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES FOR THESIS

Part 1: Social Media and Influencer Marketing strategy in the Fashion Business

As a person who have had experienced working in the fashion industry,

1. What are your opinions on the importance of Social Media with a fashion brand in HCMC?
2. What are your opinions on the reason behind the rise of 'doing business through Instagram', especially for the fashion business which requires significant visuality?
3. What role does an influencer have towards Millennial consumers regarding a brand's marketing aspects?
4. When implementing Social Media and Influencer Marketing, what do you think are the criteria that would engage the consumers/followers?
5. What is your opinion on the idea that Influencer Marketing is the fastest growing strategy in the fashion business these days?
6. Why should brands use Influencer Marketing over paid ads or other forms of marketing such as traditional marketing methods?

Part 2: Fashion Influencer with marketing

7. What do you think are the criteria when an influencer chooses a brand to collaborate with?
8. In your opinion, which scenario do influencers refuse the offer for collaboration from a brand?

Part 3: Influencers role on Millennial consumers

9. What are your opinions on the fact that influencers are partly responsible for their followers' buying behaviours when they make online purchases rather than experiencing the items in real life beforehand?
10. Are influencers considered role models and in which way do influencers concentrate on offering their followers essential information that their followers can rely on?
11. What are your thoughts on the fact that influencers should or should not express their real-life characteristics online?
12. What are your visions on the future of Influencer marketing in the fashion business?
Do you have something else to share that you felt was not included in the interview questionnaires?

Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX 2

Dear Ms. (...),

My name is An Nguyen, currently an undergraduate at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, Finland. I am conducting a study on Social Media and Influencer Marketing effect on Millennials' buying behaviour in HCMC, Vietnam. Therefore, the purpose of this interview is to examine the theoretical research on the topic mentioned above.

I am extremely grateful for the interview acceptance from Ms. (...), whose answers will be dealt with confidentially. The results of the interview will be presented in summaries according to the themes found in the answers. The individual respondent's answers will not be displayed in a way that could be linked to a specific respondent.

Attached below is the file of the interview questionnaires. The answers to the questionnaires can either be in English or Vietnamese, depending on the respondent's preference. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any problems regarding the questionnaires.

Thank you so much for your participation!

Sincerely,

An Nguyen.