

When Does the Influencer Matter?

The Honors Program

Honors Thesis

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Abstract/summary

The purpose of this research is to identify what factors contribute to the effectiveness of social media influencers' posts. The first phase of this project studied people's initial feelings towards social media influencers using a focus group. The results indicated that social media influencers are in fact effective and influential. The second phase of this study tested what factors increase and decrease the effectiveness of a social media influencers post, and what factors will get them the most engagement. This was tested through sixteen experimental conditions with different variations of a fake social media influencer post. Five dependent variables were tested, willingness to share the post, willingness to buy, attitude toward the brand, attitude towards the ad, and attitude towards the influencer. Four independent variables were also measured, size of the influencer (micro or macro), picture (present or not), discount (present or not), and level of purchase involvement (high or low), as well as several contributing variables about personality. The results contended that the presence of a picture in a social media influencers ad was had a positive effect on willingness to share the post, willingness to buy, attitude toward the brand, and attitude towards the ad. Discount also was significant to consumers' attitudes towards the brand and the ad. Level of involvement and size of the influencer only proved to be statistically significant towards the effectiveness of the post when interaction effects were found between one or more of those variables. The research and analysis conducted will provide valuable information regarding the effectiveness of social media influencers and the relevance of them pertaining to technological shifts and advancements in the marketing field.

Introduction

Over the past three years, there has been a 1,500% increase in google searches for “influencer marketing” (The State of Influencer Marketing, 2019). With the progression and advancements made in technology and more specifically social media, the realm of marketing has transformed. Traditional marketing no longer withholds the same amount of influence as it did a decade ago. Consumers now actively seek out social media influencers, as well as reviews and comments on social media, to find reliable information before making a purchasing decision. Influencer marketing allows for higher levels of involvement surrounding brand engagement, as well as more interaction with customers and potential customers.

Our buying habits have shifted to online shopping, and millennials are more susceptible to trusting online sites and influences from social media (Lim, X. et al. (2017). Social media marketing influencers have been on the rise as companies realize that traditional marketing no longer serves its purpose or makes significant impacts in a consumer purchase intent or attitude. Social media influencers serve essentially as direct sellers to companies, promoting and displaying their products and services on their social media platforms (Ferrell, 2012). The ability for influencers to interact directly with consumers makes this form of marketing significantly more effective. The consumer-influencer interaction plays a role in altering a consumer’s initial attitude and purchase intent, in either a positive or negative way.

The purpose of my research is to answer questions to deepen the research on this topic and intend to make inferences about how marketing influencers can strengthen their influencing power. I am going to be studying consumer purchasing patterns, purchase intent, risk perception,

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and consumer attitudes as they relate to influencer marketing within social media. This is relevant to understand how the world is shifting to a digitized and untraditional form of marketing, as well as how businesses employing the use of social media influencers can grasp the most critical stipulations to a post to gain maximum exposure and engagement.

Literature Review

Influencer Marketing

The enormous expansion of technology and social media has transformed the basis of direct selling and has made it critical that organizations understand how it directly affects the productivity and efficacy of marketing strategies and activities. The Internet has transformed the way we search for information, how we interact with each other and, more importantly, the way we shop (Racherla, P., & King, R. A., 2012). There has been a 325% increase in searches for influencer marketing topics from 2016-2017 (Connick, 2018). Traditional marketing is no longer an effective method of influencing a buyer to make a purchase. Consumers are utilizing online sources and social media to find information on products and services (Lee, 2012).

"For instance, when you contemplate a major purchase, such as a new roof, a flat-screen TV, or a good surgeon, you're not likely to go looking for a salesperson to talk to or to read through a bunch of corporate website content. Instead, you'll probably ask neighbors or friends — your peer network — what or whom they're using" (Lee, 2012, para. 7). Ads inherently interrupt consumers viewing patterns, leading to traditional ads being less effective. Since there are ways now to filter them out, consumers are willing to pay money just so they do not have to view ads,

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as they are a nuisance. (Brown & Hayes, 2016). Social media users are overall more likely to engage with an ad shared by one of their social media peers (Lee, 2013).

Influencer Marketing is the fastest growing online customer acquisition method (De Loache, 2018). Influencers can be defined as “a third-party who significantly shapes the customer’s purchasing decision, but may never be accountable for it” (Brown & Hayes, 2016, pg. 50).

Marketing influencers are essentially direct sellers. They represent direct-selling companies or multi-level marketing companies, which are essentially a subset of direct selling companies (Liu, 2017), and continuously expand their customer base and relationships through social media platforms. “Brands engage with consumers to determine their consumers’ needs and find the best way to satisfy those needs with their brands’ offerings. This exchange often results in an interdependent relationship between the individual and the brand” (McCarthy, 2016, pg. 14).

Influencers have the flexibility to choose what platforms they will use to reach their peers which creates a sense of interest to viewers while being less intrusive and more responsive than traditional online ads (Connick, 2018).

Influencer marketing can provide a highly targeted, cost-efficient alternative to traditional advertising methods. (Sharma, 2016). "Influencer marketing embeds brand messages into content in a way that resonates more authentically. As a result, an influencer post reaches its target market quicker than a paid 30-second media spot that will be seen by a general audience" (Sharma, 2016, pg. 47). Technology is helping direct sellers work more efficiently and utilizing more effective communication platforms to expand their network (Harrison & Hair, 2017). "The use of technology is inextricably linked to connecting direct sellers to peer networks that increase

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a customer's perceived relationship quality, as well as the performance of direct sellers" (Harrison & Hair, 2017, pg. 47). Innovative companies are rapidly tapping into influencer marketing strategies to keep up with competition as well as gain a competitive advantage over competitors that have not yet realized the benefits of utilizing this form of marketing. Clinique, for example, has enabled social media usage for their consultants to reach more customers. (Collins, 2018).

Marketing influencers success is dependent on their communicative skills and the ability to connect with customers to build a trustworthy relationship (Harrison & Hair, 2017). "Direct sellers have maintained a competitive edge because of their skills in connecting with people, an industry-wide focus on business ethics, and the trust they garner through word of mouth networking" (Ferrell, 2012, pg.48). "An individual's influence is derived not from the fact that they blog, but from some other source such as their job, experience, knowledge, or status" (Brown & Hayes, 2016, pg. 160). "Social media reduces the perceived distance between brands and consumers, such that relationships are two-sided, intimate, and close" (Kupfer, Vor Der Holte, Kubler & Hennig-Thurau, 2018, pg. 27). As consumers on social media transition from being passive consumers to active consumers engaging with an influencer on social media, "eWOM and C2C communications become central to the development of marketing strategies" (Racherla & King, 2012, pg. 73). 31% of consumers across the US and Europe said they purchased a product or service solely based on a social media influencer post (De Loache, M. 2018).

Social Media

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With more than 1 billion social media users in existence, nearly 50% of Americans age 11+ have a presence on at least one social networking site" (Ferrell, n.d., pg.274). Social Media has been on the rise for years now and is progressively gaining influence. Most companies now spend about 10% of their marketing budgets on social media (Colicev, Malshe, Pauwels, 2018). Social media enables messages to be spread more rapidly than traditional forms of relaying information. (Brown & Hayes, 2016). Based on a study done in 2018, the leading benefits of using social media for marketing was for increased exposure as the number one benefit and increased traffic as the number two benefit. (Social Media Examiner, 2018). Social media is known as a platform where individuals display the best version of themselves. They present a certain persona that their followers identify them by. When a person posts a statement for a certain brand, that brand is then linked back to that person and consumers engage with a brand, they think of that person as the brand (Vanmeter, Syrdal, Powell-Mantel, Grisaffe, &Nesson, 2018).

A study completed by OnePoll in 2017 informs us that the highest likelihood that a consumer would buy a retail product through a brands social media is based on images and reviews from customers who previously purchased the product. (Curalate, 2017). "Well-known brands are more likely to involve stronger brand connections and through that self-connection comes an increase in a consumers' likelihood and willingness to exert their resources to promote and defend a brand" (Vanmeter et al., 2018). 66% of B2C marketers in North America stated that the leading content marketing metric used by them was through social media sharing. (Content Marketing Institute, 2016). Based on a study done from 2017 through January of 2018, it is shown that the primary social media platform used by marketing influencers was Instagram with 78% of respondents choosing Instagram as the most effective platform. (eMarketer, 2018).

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Celebrity endorsements are effective in creating brand awareness but social media influencers have a more significant impact on consumer engagement and brand loyalty (Lim, X. et al, 2017). “Messages proclaimed by social media influencers are often perceived as more reliable and compelling to consumers” (Lim, X. et al. (2017). Mediakix conducted a study in 2017 that told us the global influencer market size is expected to grow from 1.6 billion dollars in 2018 to 2.38 billion dollars by 2019. (Mediakix, 2017). The growth of this is going to be heavily influenced by the power of social media and the influencers making this form of marketing so successful. Only 3% of consumers are influenced by celebrity endorsements. Consumers are able to connect and relate more to marketing influencers rather than celebrity influencers. Several studies have proven to show that social media influencers are more trusted than celebrity endorsements. A survey conducted by Variety showed that "62 percent of people between the ages 18 and 24 would buy a product endorsed by a YouTube influencer over a product endorsed by a celebrity" (Burke, 2017, pg.12). Micro influencers, which are lower grade influencers with less than 50,000 followers, state that Instagram is their platform of choice for posting content. 59% of micro influencers reported Instagram to be the most effective platform for engaging the audience. (Barker, 2017).

Risk and Trust

Perceived risk when making purchases can be understood as a consumer’s belief about the potential losses or other negative outcomes from transacting on the internet (Ingham, Cadieux, & Mekki Berrada, 2015). Within certain product categories, it would be rare to come across consumers utilizing marketing influencers to make purchase decisions. In most cases, these product categories are ones that bear greater risk such as; financial services/consulting, legal

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matters, or health-related topics. (Brown & Hayes, 2016). Other product categories rely heavily on the trust component of a transaction. "The strongest group of influences are our friends and family, or at least people we trust" (Brown & Hayes, 2016, p. 177). A study done in 2018 tells us that adults indicate high trust in potential influencers with the highest trust category of influence being friends and family or professionals with expertise in the field. (Proof, 2018). Familiarity is a prerequisite of trust, people are over 70% more likely to make a purchase online if the product or service was recommended by someone (Arnold, 2017). Consumers assess an influencers prior content and feedback as a metric to gauge the quality of information they are receiving and the credibility of the source. (Racherla & King, 2012).

"Recognition of riskiness can be triggered by observation or cues found in messages, which people compare to their past experiences and extant knowledge (Kim, 2018, pg.11). Results of prior studies propose that online transaction risk aversion would decrease with trust existing. (Dachyar & Banjarnahor, 2017). A positive brand reputation is also critical in decreasing the amount of risk and increasing trust (Dachyar & Banjarnahor, 2017). Brand reputations are built largely in part due to word of mouth. Word of mouth encourages adoption of the given product or service to consumers, all on the basis of trust-which decreases consumer risk aversion. (Fileri, Algezau, & Mcleay, 2015). In contexts of high situational involvement and risk, utilizing a corporate voice as an influence lessens consumers risk perception.

Given how obtainable social media is to the millennial population, they are more susceptible to purchasing online. 79% of respondents would be interested in purchasing on Facebook, 59% would be interested in purchasing on Instagram, 59% would be interested in purchasing on

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Pinterest, 34% on Twitter, and 22% on Snapchat. (Curalate: Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield, & Byers, 2018). However, aside from the millennial population, consumers are regularly disinclined to purchase online because of the greater apparent risk in comparison to traditional shopping because there is no delay between the transaction and receiving the product or service. (Dachyar & Banjarnahor, 2017).

Purchase Intent and Consumer Attitude

Purchase intent is a buyer's probability that they will purchase a product or service. Engagement from influencers also comes into play one of the main drivers of purchasing decisions as it shapes consumers' attitudes. (Arnold, 2017). Consumer engagement increases brand loyalty and increases customer experience overall (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Consumer brand engagement can be conceptualized as positive consumer emotions displayed throughout cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during consumer/brand interactions (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). "Both attitude and subjective norms are key consistency determinants of consumers purchase intention on virally marketed products/services via social network marketing" (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015, pg. 3). A study done in 2017 by Curalate reiterates that over 50% of respondents found they would be more likely to purchase a product through a brand on social media if they saw images of feedback/results from customers who previously purchased the product. 49% of respondents said they would be more likely to purchase a product through a brands social media if they had an easy payment system (saved information like Amazon pay). 36% said they would be more likely to buy if they could buy it right from that social media site, 39% they would be more likely if they were also given recommendations of other products they might like. (Curalate, 2017). "When individuals are highly motivated, they

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have a higher ability to process a message and are more likely to form careful evaluations based on the message” (Kapitan & Silvera, 2015, pg. 556). Studies show that positive attitudes towards social media advertisements have a positive effect on consumers’ behavior and purchase intent (Talih Akkaya, Akyol, & Golbasi Simsek, n.d.).

Communication styles also play a central role in increasing the trustworthiness of a brand or influencer, shaping the consumer's attitude leading towards or away from a positive purchase intent, depending on the tone and product/service category. (Barcelos et al., 2018). Authentic communication on social media when promoting a product or selling something should make consumers feel that communication is sincere and will overall increase brand identification and attitude towards a brand. (Kupfer et al., 2018). Direct communications with consumers and posting general updates or news about the brand will enhance the intimate perceptions and make consumers feel more connected with the brand which is positively associated with consumers’ evaluations of the brand. (Kupfer, Vor Der Holte, Kubler & Hennig-Thurau, 2018). The tone of voice radiated through social media influencers can have a positive or negative influence on a consumers purchase intent for a given product or service. Positive attitudes towards social media ads directly correlate to changes in consumer behavior and purchasing intention. “A tone of voice may elicit different expectations from the consumers depending on the brand’s positioning, typicality, perceived authenticity, and so on” (Barcelos et al. 2018, pg. 14). The brand’s tone of voice can be perceived as especially important during initial brand encounters. (Barcelos et al., 2018). “Prior knowledge can affect perceptions of online consumer reviews because it is an important factor in information-processing. (Do-Hyung Park, Jumin Lee, & Ingo Han, 2007).

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"When a SMI posts about a product, in their area of expertise, they have tried the product and recommend it, like a friend, not a sales pitch. The audience trusts the opinion of the SMI and uses that information to make purchase decisions, like with offline opinion leaders" (Burke, 2017). According to a McKinsey study, social recommendations influenced 26% of online purchases, and about 2/3rd's of the social recommendations had a direct impact on the point of purchase (Pophal, 2016). "Consumers tend to trust experts for specific topics. For example, an individual could seek out a SMI in fashion to see an "expert" opinion and receive advice on clothing brands, products, and style" (Burke, 2017, pg. 10).

Source credibility coincides with an influencers tone of voice. Source credibility is built on the basis of trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise of the influencer communicating the message. (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Once an influencer is established, they subconsciously elicit certain expectations from their followers which directly influence the degree and quality of content they post (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Social influence has a deeper effect on an individual's perceptions of a source or content in increasing their purchase intent. On the contrary, consumers taking the time to submit online reviews based on their experience with a product or service are more susceptible to giving biased input that has the risk of being inaccurate. "Influence from friends and relatives creates pressure by forming subjective norms that motivate consumers' intention" (Gunawan & Haurng, 2015, pg. 5). Consumers purchase intention is increased with the subjective norm implications implying positive consumer attitudes are largely created on the basis of source credibility and social influence, (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). Influencers are significantly more persuasive if they are regarded or perceived as experts. People would be more likely to be persuaded by social media influencers

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that displayed a similar mindset or someone they could relate to, or someone they potentially idolize. (Lim, X. J., Radzol, A. R. bt M., Cheah, J.H., & Wong, M. W. (2017).

Comparing purchase intent and risk:

From a study done by Campbell and Goodstein (2001), we can conclude that risk averse consumers are more likely to stay with familiar brands and options rather than explore the uncertainty. Consumers that are risk averse are typically hesitant to steer away from the norms that they are used to because they want to avoid any behavior that could create a higher degree of risk for them. (Barcelos, Dantas & Senecal, 2018). Contrarily, in low risk purchasing situations, purchase intent is significantly higher because risk averse consumers are aware that a low risk choice does not have a significant amount of unfavorable consequences. (Barcelos et al., 2018). "Participants level of engagement is strongly correlated to factors such as brand satisfaction, identifying with the brand, and trust" (Dessart et al., 2015, pg. 38). "It is noticeable that the delivery of word-of-mouth is an efficient way to make a decision easier, instead of confusing and low credibility information in the form of traditional marketing" p.42 (Lee, 2013).

Conclusion

The proposed study will attempt to measure what factors are relevant to a Social Media Influencer's post related to levels of effectiveness. The research questions that will be tested in the study are as follows:

- Does the size of the influencer play a role in the degree of influence they emanate?
- Does the level of purchase involvement required effect consumers' willingness to engage with an influencer?

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- Does the presence of a discount impact the posts effectiveness? Influencers effectiveness?
- Does the presence of a visual impact the posts effectiveness? Influencers effectiveness?

Methodology & Results

Study One

The first method employed was a qualitative focus group. The design of the focus group stemmed from the literature review findings and aligned with the theme of research questions developed. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of how consumers feel about social media influencers. The list of questions asked in the focus group can be found in Appendix I.

Data Collection

A total of twenty Bryant University students partook in this focus group. There were ten males and ten females, ages ranging from 19-22.

Analysis & Results:

Of the 20 focus group participants, 100% of them follow at least one social media influencer. Given that this method was qualitative, the results were able to form general conclusions about consumer's attitudes towards social media influencers. This particular method determined that female consumers follow social media influencers, even ones they do not know well, for fashion trends, travel/lifestyle trends, and fitness trends. On the contrary, males are more apt to follow

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specific social media influencer's that are famous and well known for comedy or popular trends for social identification. The focus group results also allowed for the determination that social media influencers are generally more effective, for both males and females, when promoting products rather than services. Finally, the results show that overall, social media influencers are a valid source of information and consumers are at least moderately influenced by them online. Given these results, conclusions were formed to narrow down the scope of research where another research method was initiated in the form of a survey.

Study Two

The other research method employed was a survey. This survey was formed with sixteen experimental conditions to test the variables contributing to the effectiveness of a social media influencers post. The sixteen ambiguous scenarios all contained different variations of a "social media influencer" post. The scenario's presented were vague to ensure no bias towards particular social media influencers. Following each condition were a series of questions held constant for all conditions to test consumer behavior and purchase intent for each respondent. Two out of the sixteen experimental conditions are presented in Appendix II.

Data Collection

A total of 331 participants responded to this study. Each survey respondent was presented one of the 16 scenarios at random, contributing to about 20 respondents per condition. Of the 331 respondents, 30% were male, and 70% were female. 65% of respondents were between the ages of 20 and 35. 17% of them were over the age of 50. 9% were under 20 years old, and the last 9% of respondents were between the ages of 35 and 50. 44% of respondents had a college degree.

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37% of respondents have completed some college. 11% of respondents completed a graduate degree. 7% of respondents completed a high school degree. Finally, only 1% of respondents obtain less than a high school degree. Of the 331 participants, 45% of them classify their socioeconomic status as middle class. 39% of respondents identified as being upper middle class. 8% of respondents responded to lower middle class. 7% of respondents identified themselves as upper class — finally, 1% of respondents identified as lower class. Graphic visualizations of the demographic data from the survey can be found in Appendix III. The survey was created on Qualtrics, and all respondents used Qualtrics to respond on either a desktop, laptop, or cellular device.

Measures:

Each survey condition started with either a micro influencer or macro influencer. Macro influencer's were designated 100,000 followers in the post whereas micro influencer's had 3,000 followers. Following that, the influencer post presented either a high involvement purchase (travel), or a low involvement purchase (apparel). Each condition included either a picture or discount, one or the other, both, or neither. The experimental condition models can be found in Appendix IV. The purpose of testing numerous conditions was to examine which condition, or combination of conditions, would emit the highest degree of influence from an average consumer's standpoint. All survey questions can be found in Appendix V.

Almost all of the survey questions used a variation of a Likert scale with 3-7 semantic differential items for respondents to answer for each individual question. The questions were

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grouped by different consumer behavior topics to draw conclusions from the study's research questions.

The first set of questions measured the respondent's willingness to share the post and to buy from the post as well as attitude toward the ad, brand, and influencer they were shown in their given survey condition. The first Likert Matrix Table measured willingness to buy the product/service shown in the condition above using three seven-point semantic differential items. Answer options ranged from extremely unlikely to extremely likely. This was the only survey question that varied depending on the scenario presented. The three items remained the same for the eight scenarios containing low involvement products. However, for high involvement product scenarios, only one item was measured to determine willingness to buy using the same seven answer options. The next Likert Scale measured willingness to share the influencers post with friends or family. This was measured using a bipolar matrix table, displaying two extremes of a statement. Respondents selected one of the points between each statement, dictating their wiliness to share. The next three Likert Scales measured respondent's attitude towards the brand, ad, and the influencer pertaining to the experimental condition presented to them. These were all measured using bipolar matrix scales.

The second set of questions was a series of five Likert Scales with seven-point answer options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These questions measured variables that would likely play a role in a consumers purchase intent and attitude. These questions were general and remained constant through each scenario. The next Likert Scale presented was thriftiness. This was measured by four seven-point semantic differential items. The options ranged from strongly

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disagree to strongly agree. Following that, another Likert scale was presented asking respondents to state the level to which they agreed with the following statements surrounding risk avoidance. Five seven-point semantic differential items were asked. Visual preference was measured next using five seven-point semantic differential items for the respondent to answer on a Likert Scale. The next question measured respondent's self-esteem, this was measured by four seven-point semantic differential items. The final two questions in this section studied extroversion and introversion. These statements were presented in a Likert scale, asking respondents to state the level to which they agree with the given statement. Six seven-point semantic differential items were used for both of these measures.

Analysis & results

In order to form conclusions, statistical analysis using SPSS was initiated to measure interaction between contributing variables. To run the reports, five dependent variables were tested; willingness to share the post, willingness to buy based on the post, attitude toward the brand in the post, attitude toward the advertisement, and attitude toward the influencer in the post. Four independent variables were also tested; picture (present or not), discount (present or not), purchase involvement (high or low), and size of influencer (micro or macro). Controls were also implemented for some tests depending on the statistical significance levels and interaction effects.

Willingness to share post

ANOVA was computed, comparing willingness to share the post to the presence of a picture, presence of a discount, size of the influencer, and level of purchase involvement. A significance

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was found with presence of a picture, $p < .001$, as well as an interaction effect between picture and size, $p = .026$. This analysis revealed that when a picture is present ($M = 4.088$) willingness to share the post is higher than when a picture is not present ($M = 3.203$). The interaction effect between picture and size states that when there is no picture and the size of the influencer is micro ($M = 2.89$) the willingness to buy is lower than when there is no picture and the size of the influencer is macro ($M = 2.93$). This interaction effect also reveals that when there is a picture present and the size of the influencer is micro ($M = 4.28$), the willingness to buy is higher than when there is a picture present and the size of the influencer is macro ($M = 4.16$).

An ANCOVA was conducted comparing willingness to share the post based on the presence of a picture, covarying for visual preference. No significant difference was found. Willingness to share was not influenced by visual preference, but the presence of a picture was still found to be significant ($p < .001$). When a picture is present ($M = 4.08$) willingness to share is higher than when a picture is not present ($M = 3.14$).

Willingness to buy

ANOVA was computed, comparing willingness to buy to the presence of a picture, presence of a discount, size of the influencer, and level of purchase involvement. A significance was found with the presence of a picture ($p = .008$). The analysis revealed that willingness to buy when a picture is present ($M = 4.037$) is higher, as opposed to when a picture is not present ($M = 3.553$). An interaction effect between involvement and size was found ($p = .029$). When a micro influencer is promoting a low involvement product or service, there proved to be a lower willingness to buy ($M = 2.81$) than when a macro influencer is promoting low involvement

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products/services ($M=3.93$). When high involvement products/services are present with a macro influencer ($M=4.14$), willingness to buy is much higher than when a micro influencer promotes high involvement products/services ($M=3.80$).

ANCOVA was computed comparing willingness to buy as the dependent variable to the presence of a picture, covarying for visual preference. No significant difference was found. Willingness to share was not influenced by visual preference, but the presence of a picture was still found to be significant. When a picture is present ($M= 4.040$) willingness to buy is higher than when a picture is not present ($M=3.515$).

Attitude toward the brand

ANOVA was computed comparing attitude towards the brand to the presence of a picture, presence of a discount, size of the influencer, and level of purchase involvement. A significant difference was found between presence of a picture ($p=.007$), as well as presence of a discount ($p=.016$). This analysis revealed that when a picture is present ($M=4.681$), attitude towards the brand is stronger than when a picture is not present ($M=4.271$). Analysis also revealed that when a discount is present ($M=4.659$), attitude towards the brand is stronger than when a discount is not present ($M=4.293$).

ANCOVA was run again comparing attitude towards the brand to discount, co-varying for thriftiness. No significant difference was found after covarying out thriftiness. Discount was still found to be significant when covarying for thriftiness however, ($p=.009$). Attitude towards the

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brand was stronger when a discount is present ($M= 4.655$), than when no discount is included including ($M= 4.253$).

Another ANCOVA was run comparing attitude toward the brand to the presence of a picture, covarying out visual preference. including only picture as the fixed factor and adding a control of visual preference. Picture presence still holds significance on attitude towards the brand ($p=.004$), but no significant difference was found even after covarying for visual preference. When a picture was present ($M=4.686$) attitude towards the brand was much higher than when a picture was not present ($M=4.243$).

Attitude towards the ad

ANOVA was computed, comparing attitude towards the ad to the presence of a picture, presence of a discount, size of the influencer, and level of purchase involvement. A significant difference was found with the presence of a picture ($p < .001$), as well as with the presence of a discount ($p < .001$). Analysis revealed that attitude towards the ad is higher ($M=4.996$) than when a picture is not present ($M=4.389$). Further analysis revealed that when a discount is present ($M=4.984$), as opposed to when a discount is not present ($M=4.389$).

ANCOVA was computed comparing attitude towards the ad and presence of a picture, covarying for visual preference. Picture presence still holds significant difference while covarying for visual preference ($p < .001$). Visual preference does not hold statistical significance ($p=.319$). Analysis revealed that when a picture is present, attitude towards the ad is higher ($M= 4.976$) than when a picture is not present ($M= 4.363$).

Another ANCOVA was run comparing attitude towards the ad and presence of a discount while covarying for thriftiness. When controlling for thriftiness, discount still holds a statistical significance ($p < .001$). When a discount is present, the attitude towards the ad is higher ($M = 4.970$) than when a discount is not present ($M = 4.339$).

Attitude towards the Influencer

ANOVA was computed, comparing attitude towards the ad to the presence of a picture, presence of a discount, size of the influencer, and level of purchase involvement. A significant interaction effect between picture presence and size of the influencer was found ($p = .016$). Analysis revealed that when a picture is present, attitude towards the influencer is stronger when the size of the influencer is macro ($M = 5.21$) rather than when the influencer is micro ($M = 4.71$). Analysis also revealed that when no picture, attitude towards the influencer is stronger when the size of the influencer is macro ($M = 4.36$), than when the size of the influencer is micro ($M = 3.75$).

Conclusion/Discussion:

This study was able to disclose several conclusions. One conclusion to be made is that presence of a picture proved to be statistically significant in four out of the five dependent variables tested; those being willingness to share the post, willingness to buy, attitude towards the brand, and attitude towards the ad. It can also be said that when a picture is present and the size of the influencer is micro, there is a stronger likelihood to share the post. Presence of a discount proved to be positively significant within attitude towards the brand as well as attitude towards the ad. It was found that the interaction effect between level of involvement and size of the influencer

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reveal that willingness to buy is highest when there is a high involvement product/service purchase and the size of the influencer is macro. Attitude towards the ad is highest when both a discount and picture are present in the ad. The attitude towards the influencer proves to be highest when the interaction effect between picture presence and size of influencer indicates the presence of a picture and the size of the influencer is macro.

Limitations and Future Research:

Both research methods employed were under strict time constraints that limited the subject pool. The survey was available for only one week. Due to the nature of data collection, majority of survey respondents and all focus group participants were college students with prior knowledge to the topic. Future studies could focus on how marketers and social media influencers could implement these findings into their posts to enhance their effectiveness. Future research could investigate further the covarying effects of different personality traits that could potentially effect the given dependent variables. If time was permitted, more statistical analysis would have been performed which may have led to more validity in the results.

Appendices

Appendix I. Focus Group Questions

1. Are you influenced by other people when making purchasing decisions?
 - a. What about online purchases?
2. Do you believe that non/friends and family have influence on your purchase behavior online?
 - a. If yes, who are those people?
3. When you think of the phrase social media influencer, what are some words or thoughts that come to mind? (2-3 things)
4. If one of your friend's/family members posts about a product or brand, does your attitude change for that product/brand?
 - a. What about if a social media influencer posts about it?
 - b. Did it change in a positive or negative manner? (for both)
5. Have you ever purchased a product because of a social media influencers post about it?
 - a. If yes: what about the post/influencer/influencer expertise/ the way the influencer communicates made you buy it?
6. Do you follow any social media influencers?
 - a. Yes/No
7. What is your reasoning behind following them?
8. Do you follow any of them specifically for the product/brand they promote?
9. Do you feel that influencers work equally well for various goods/ services/ ideas/ places?
10. At the end of the day after seeing a social media influencers post:
 - a. Do you have a stronger desire/likelihood to purchase the product?
 - b. Did you have a stronger likelihood to find out more about the product/brand?
 - c. Did the post not influence you at all?
11. Please provide your general opinion of online/ social media influencers. Do you think they work? If not- why not?

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Appendix II. Two of the 16 experimental conditions presented in survey

Involvement (low- apparel), picture (present), discount (present), size of influencer (micro)

Jen Jay is active on all of her social media profiles and frequently blogs/vlogs on the topic of trendy apparel. She currently has 3,000 followers across all her platforms.

Recently she has been blogging about VAZA, an apparel brand.

Consequently, Jen Jay was contacted by VAZA and was asked to actively promote VAZA brand. As part of this promotion Jen Jay is able to offer her followers 15% off their next VAZA online order cost.

Some of VAZA apparel samples are pictured below:



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Involvement (high- travel), picture (present), discount (present), size of influencer (macro)

Jen Jay is active on all of her social media profiles and frequently blogs/vlogs on the topic of travel. She currently has 100,000 followers across all her platforms.

Recently she has been blogging about VAZA, a travel agency that organizes trips around the world.

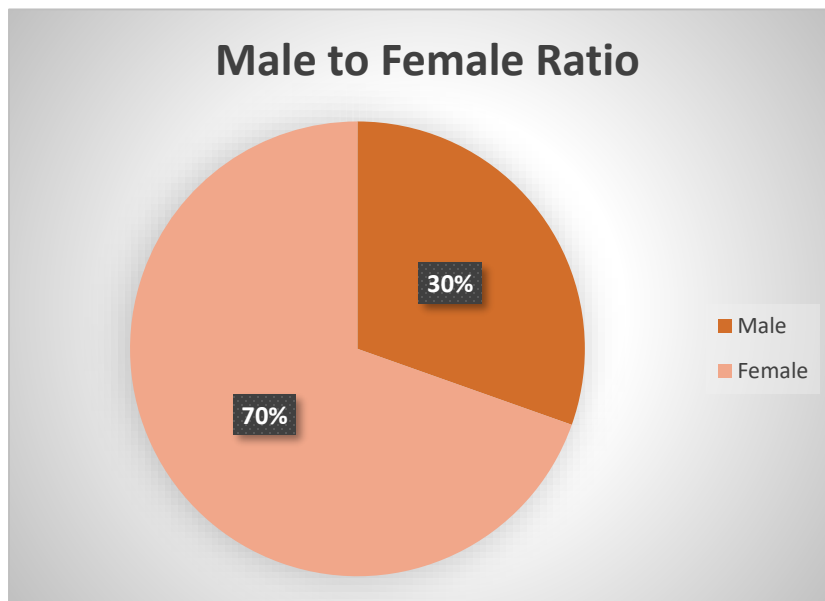
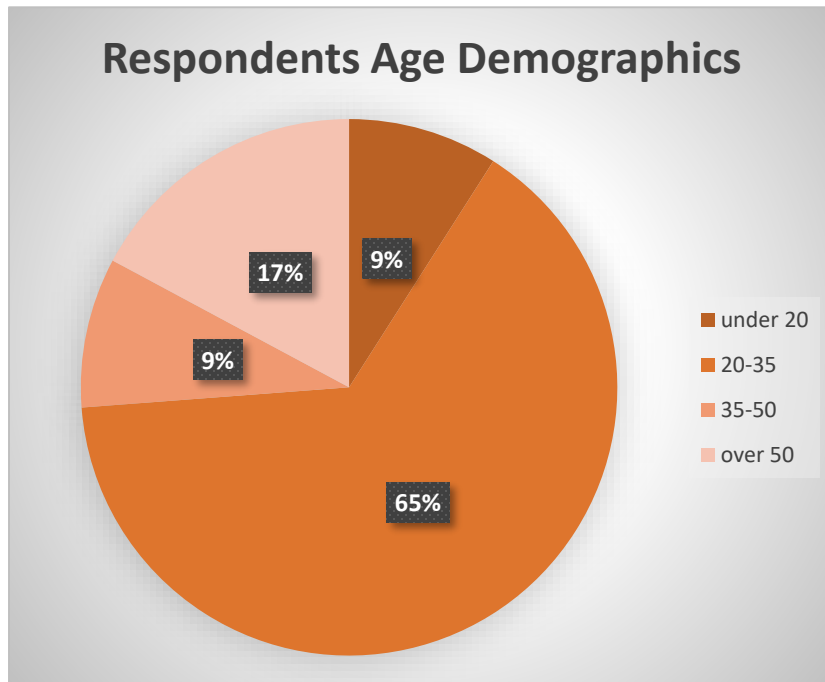
Consequently, Jen Jay was contacted by VAZA and was asked to actively promote VAZA brand. As part of this promotion Jen Jay is able to offer her followers 15% off their next VAZA travel package price.

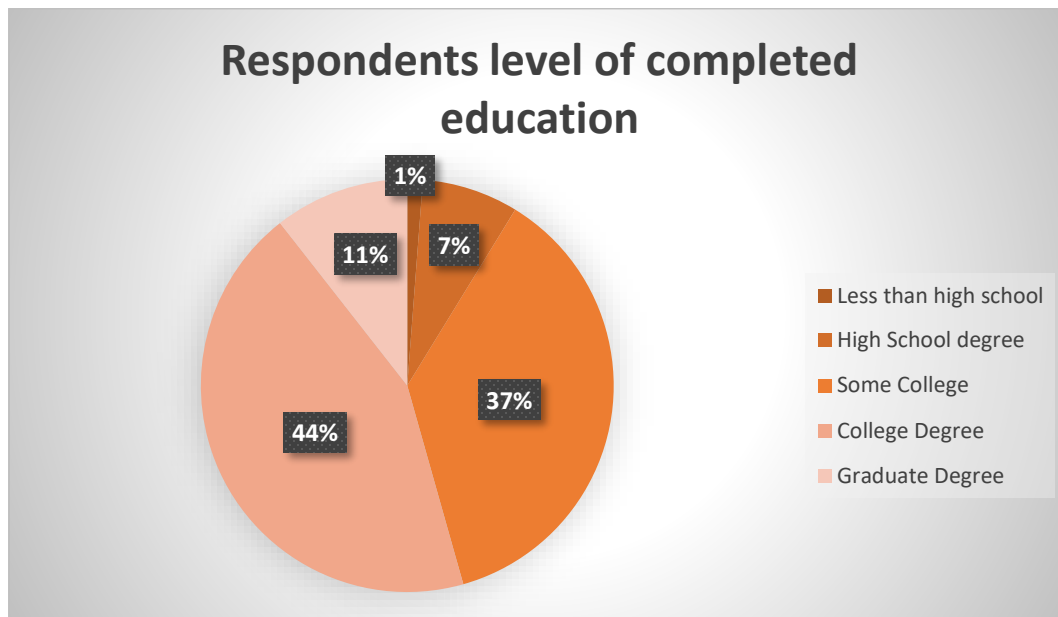
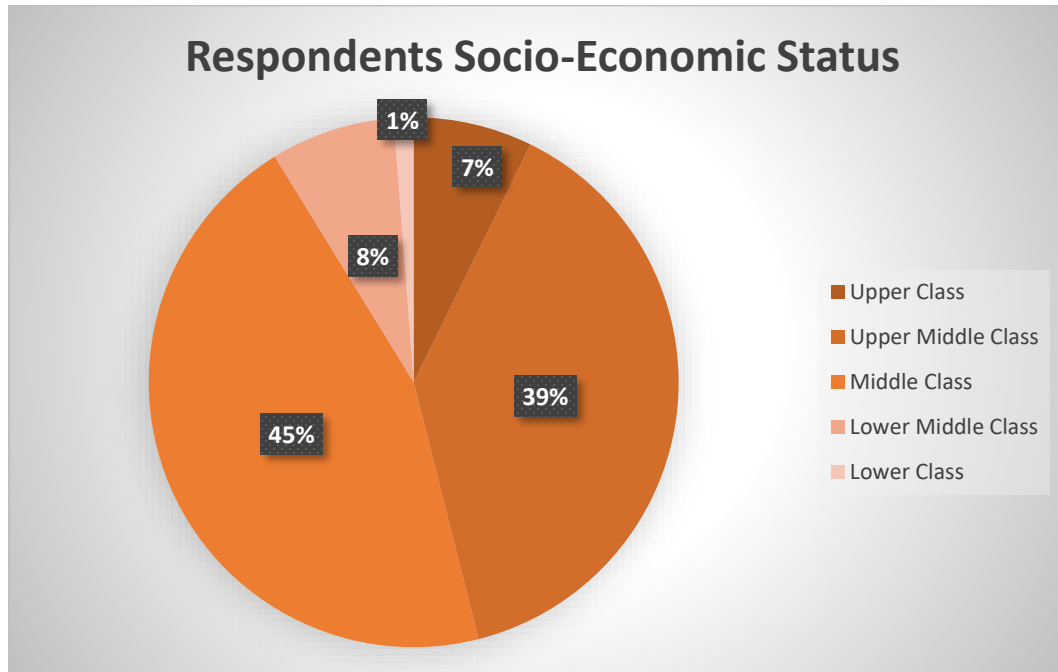
Some of VAZA travel photos are pictured below:



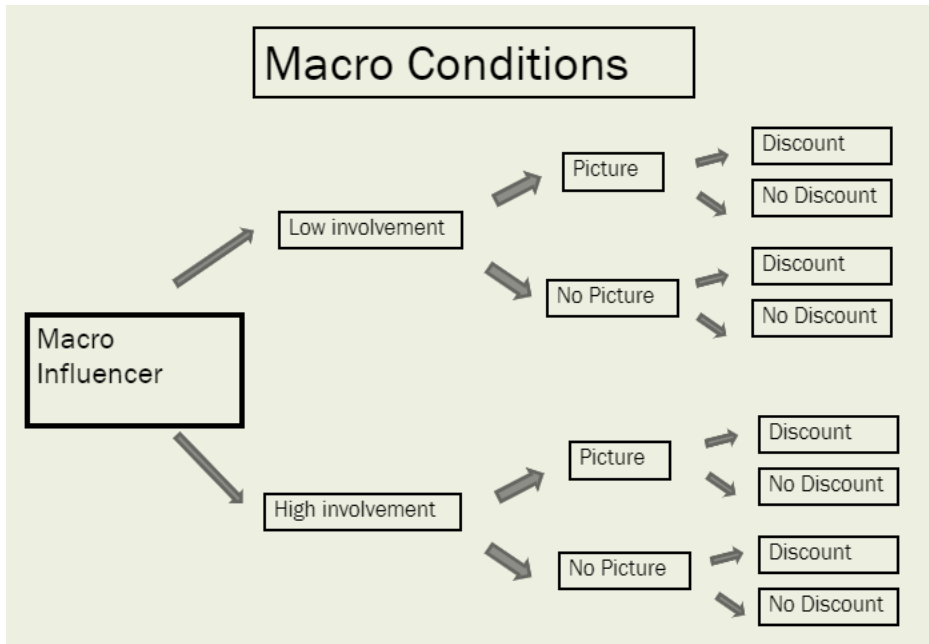
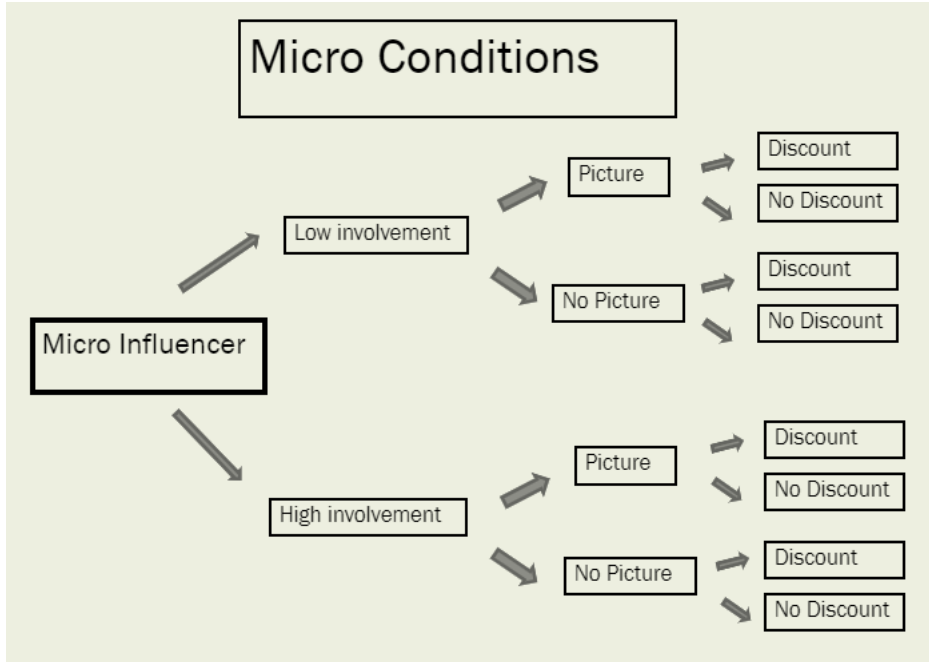
Note that the remaining 14 experimental conditions were all based off the two shown above and contained different variations of these posts, including and/or excluding the factors (picture, size, involvement, and discount) being tested.

Appendix III. Demographic Data of survey respondents





Appendix IV. Experimental Condition Models for Survey



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Appendix V. Survey Questions

Overall Likelihood to be influenced:

The likelihood I would be influenced by Jen Jay to purchase VAZA brand:

Not at all likely											Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Willingness to share post:

How willing or likely are you to share Jen Jay's post with your friends/family?

Unwilling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Willing
Would not	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Would
Unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Likely
Improbable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Probable

Willingness to buy:

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements regarding VAZA apparel.

	Extremely unlikely	Moderately unlikely	Slightly unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Slightly likely	Moderately likely	Extremely likely
If I were to buy a new apparel, the probability of buying VAZA is...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The probability that I would consider buying VAZA apparel is...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The likelihood that I would purchase this apparel is...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Attitude toward Ad:

How do you feel about the Jen Jay's advertisement about VAZA?

Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favorable
Low Quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	High Quality
Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Pleasant

Attitude toward brand:

How do you feel about brand Vaza?

Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favorable
Low Quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	High Quality

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Attitude toward Influencer:

How do you **feel** about **Jen Jay**?

	Dislike	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Like
	Bad	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Good
	Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Favorable

Thriftiness:

Please state the level to which you agree with the statements below:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I believe in being careful in how I spend my money.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I discipline myself to get the most from my money.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am willing to wait on a purchase I want so that I can save money.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are things I resist buying today so I can save for tomorrow.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Risk Aversion/Avoidance:

Please state the level to which you agree with the statements below:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would rather stick with the familiar brands than explore the uncertainty of unfamiliar brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I spend little time and effort making purchasing decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am the kind of person who would try any new product once.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am cautious in trying new brands/products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I never buy something I don't know about at the risk of making a mistake.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Visual Preference:

Please state the level to which you agree with the statements below:

Most of the time I....

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Create a mental picture of what I study.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create a mental picture of what I see.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create a mental picture of what I read.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learn better when someone represents information in a pictorial way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learn better when someone uses visual aids (e.g., whiteboard, power point) to represent a subject.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Self Esteem:

Indicate on the following scale how well each of the following traits describes you:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is really true that money can buy happiness.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People judge others by the things they own.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I buy some things that I secretly hope will impress other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think others judge me as a person by the kinds of products and brands I use.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Extroversion:

If you had to describe yourself through the following statements - please state the level to which you agree with each of the statements below:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I enjoy being the center of attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to start conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy meeting new people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a wide social circle of friends and acquaintances.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find it easy to make new friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel energized when around other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Introversion:

If you had to describe yourself through the following statements - please state the level to which you agree with each of the statements below:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I prefer solitude.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel exhausted when having to socialize a lot.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find it difficult to start conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I dislike making small talk.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I carefully thinks things through before speaking.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I dislike being the center of attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographics:

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your age?

What's the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree
- Some college
- College degree
- Graduate degree

What would you consider your socioeconomic status?

- Upper Class
- Upper Middle Class
- Middle Class
- Lower Middle Class
- Lower Class

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