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What Determines Young People to Follow Influencers? The Role of Perceived Information Quality and Trustworthiness on Users' Following Intentions

Abstract

Social media is associated with the rise of new types of celebrities called influencers, who share their current experiences and ideas and often endorse brands. Developing and keeping a large community of followers is one of the most important goals of influencers. The size of their audiences is one of the elements that make them relevant to the advertising industry. The main objective of the present research is to explore the mechanism that determines users' online behavior related to influencers, such as following them on social media. Moreover, the study examined the role of the perceived information quality and of the perceived trust of the influencers in shaping audiences' attitudes toward influencers. The moderating role of the frequency of Instagram and YouTube use on the relationship between perceived information quality and trustworthiness was explored by conducting an online survey (*N*=1088). The main takeaway from the study is that influencers who want to grow their audiences have to create perceived quality content. This can contribute to both positive attitudes and the development of trust. Also, the frequency of Instagram use has a small moderating role, while the frequency of YouTube use has no effects on the trustworthiness of the influencers.

Keywords: social media, influencer, trustworthiness, source credibility, perceive information quality

Introduction

The rise of social media use as a habitual behavior has increased the search for information on the networking platforms, especially by the younger generations (Chen & Yuan, 2018; Zhang, Li, & Wang, 2013). The rise of social network sites has changed the way entities (e.g. consumers, organizations) interact with each other, the way they search and receive information (Liu et al., 2015). In 2019, there are more than 3.48 billion social media users at a global level (45% worldwide penetration) (Kemp, 2019). YouTube and Facebook dominate the social media landscape in the USA and Instagram is one of the fastest-growing social network sites (SNS) for early-stage adults. Similar trends have been reported for European countries,

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among them Romanian, the country where the present study was conducted (Statista, 2018a; Statista, 2018b).

Social media influencers are considered to be online opinion leaders. Through the content they create, through their knowledge, skills, and character, they have a certain influence on their audiences (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Bognar, Puljic & Kadezabek, 2019) aiming to make people accept recommendations (Liu et al., 2015) and even change behaviors (Byrne, Kearney & MacEvilly, 2017). Social media influencers are content creators across one or several social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or personal blogs (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011; Chen & Yuan, 2018; Versamis, 2018). These elements were rapidly acknowledged by the marketers and thus influencer marketing was developed. Some authors define influencers as people who post on social media in exchange for compensations (Campbell & Grimm, 2019). One of the main goals of influencers is to expand their communities from the status of newcomers or nano-influencers having fewer than 1,000 followers to that of the mega-influencers followed by 1 million or more followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The role of influencers in advertising campaigns worldwide has significantly increased in the last years (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). Recently, the relevance of social media influencers has gone beyond economic purposes, transcending native advertising for commercial brands (Byrne et al., 2017). Some of them engage in political communication e.g. encouraging young people to go to vote in elections for the European Parliament in 2019 (News. European Parliament, 2019). Some influencers engage in agenda building for climate change issues and sustainability (Auer, Zhang & Lee, 2014).

Having these aspects in mind the research focused on the mechanism behind users' online behavior related to influencers. The study aimed to explore the role of perceived information quality and the perceived trust of the influencers in shaping attitudes towards influencers, which lead to the behavioral intention to follow the influencers on Instagram or subscribe to the influencers' channels on YouTube. For influencers, the number of followers on Instagram and the number of subscribers on YouTube is an extremely relevant issue that can be translated as capital. Influencers are ranked and financially rewarded according to the size of their audiences. Their number of followers can have an impact on the users' perception of the products they promote (De Veirman et al., 2017; Boerman, 2019).

Influencers and their role and advertising function

Social media influencers are online opinion leaders based on the two-step communication flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). In the context of the rise of digital platforms where people can interact to a great extent, a multistep flow of communication approaches related to online opinion leaders or influencers was developed (Liu, 2007). In contrast with traditional, mainstream celebrities that used to create value only for themselves (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019), digital celebrities (Liu et al., 2015), Instafamous (Dewey, 2014), or influencers, are perceived by users as peers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). They became famous in the context of online blogging, vlogging, or social network sites (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) and managed to develop strong and deep relationships with their followers (Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Jin & Phua, 2014; Balaban & Mustă?ea, 2019).

Building large networks, gaining high recognizability, popularity, and visibility, and aiming to become trusted and engaged tastemakers are very important characteristics of an influencer (Booth & Matic, 2011; De Veirman et al., 2017; Jin et al., 2019). Influencers usually spread messages, popularize new trends (Jin et al., 2019), endorse brands or products (Boerman, van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2015; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). Thus, it can be stated that social media has launched a new challenge for brands to adapt their practices so that they can prove to be effective when it comes to influencing users' behavior (Boerman et al., 2015; Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015; Evans et al., 2017; Mayrhofer et al., 2019). Influencers tend to be early adopters in markets (Kiss & Bichler, 2008). Having a certain domain of interest (e.g. health, travel, food, lifestyle, beauty, fashion) and claiming to be experts at it, influencers quantify the horizontal interaction with their communities through the number of likes, shares, comments, direct messages (Balaban & Mustă?ea, 2019).

The mutual collaboration between brands and influencers can materialize through sharing sponsored content, posts, product placements, through documenting or hosting an event, and through making event appearances (Evans et al., 2017). In contrast to traditional advertising, influencers' endorsements, as a form of native advertising (Campbell & Evans, 2018), are likely to be considered highly credible (De Veirman et al., 2017). The Instafamous phenomenon (becoming famous through social media presence), specific to Instagram, allows users to develop very attractive personal narratives and identities, and take part in a social marketing campaign (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Abidin, 2016; Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019).

The main objective of the present research is to predict the online behavior of Instagram and YouTube users by examining the importance of the perceived quality of information and of the perceived trust of the influencer on users' attitudes towards following the influencers. Instagram, a visual aesthetics platform (Jin et al., 2019), a social media app relying on photo and video-sharing, has recently become the fastest growing social media platform (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) and the primary platform on which influencers develop their activity (Evans et al., 2017). YouTube is a platform for audio-video content and social media influencers' favorite virtual place to share vlogging activities (Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). It is a common practice among influencers to create and publish content for both Instagram and YouTube. Besides, Instagram and YouTube are among the fastest growing social media platforms for the young generation at least in the USA and in Europe (Statista, 2019a; Statista, 2019b).

According to Campbell and Farrell (2020), the advertising functions of social media influencers are communication with the audience, the role of endorsers, and that of social media managers. By succeeding to build large audiences social media influencers bring values to the brands through organic reach, specific targeting, and by gaining attention. As endorsers, social media influencers are in the meantime celebrities, experts, and fellow consumers. As social media managers, they are working on strategy, producing content, and manage their communities (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, pp. 4-7).

The number of followers an influencer has constitutes a relevant aspect of their activity. Developing and keeping a large community of followers is one of the most important goals of influencers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Sometimes companies use the number of followers as an indicator that an influencer is suitable for certain advertising campaigns since they are identified according to their target audience and network size, which quantifies the influencing power that they have (De Veirman et al., 2017). Another important concept related to influencers is

that of authenticity or perceived authenticity, the extent to which consumers perceived influencers as intrinsically motivated (Moulard et al., 2016; Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2020). Therefore, the present study addressed the following research question:

RQ. How can social media influencers build strong communities of followers based on the perceived quality of the content they create?

RQ2. Does the perceived authenticity make users follow influencers?

RQ3. Does the perceived similarity to the influencers make users follow them?

Source credibility, perceived quality of information, and trustworthiness

Within the framework of the source credibility theory, the role of attractiveness was underlined (McGuire, 1985). According to this, the effectiveness of a message depends on the familiarity, likability, and similarity of the source. In this respect, knowing the source, liking the source, and resembling the source are important features of message acceptability (Xiao et al., 2018).

The effectiveness of influencers lies in several key factors: a para-social relationship between users and influencers, influencer credibility, and trust in the influencer (Chen & Yuan, 2018). Social presence, defined as the need to feel that an actual human is being intensively interacting at the other end of the online communication process, is an important element that can explain the level of trust in influencers (Jin et al., 2019). The credibility of an influencer depends on the capacity to develop a relationship with the community of users. If it is established, the latter will follow the influencer and will have access to the content that he/she has posted on social media channels (Jin et al., 2019).

The quality of information is considered to be a very important factor that influences the decision-making process (Maltz, 2000; Price, Neiger & Shanks, 2008). Perceived information quality (PIQ), referring to the value given by the audience to the message sent, can be affected by four dimensions: credibility (reliable information), relevance (appropriate information), comprehensibility (clear information), and timeliness (quick information) (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017). Likewise, perceived information quality depends on the perceived relevance, perceived reliability, and perceived enjoyability of the information (Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006). Perceived information credibility or source credibility can influence consumers both at the intentional level and at the actual behavior level (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017; Xiao et al., 2018). Perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise are two of the components of source credibility (Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991), playing an important role in the perception of an ad endorsed by influencers, as previous studies proved (Liljander & Gummerus, 2015; Boerman, Kruikemeier & Zuiderveen Borgesius, 2017).

Previous research on influencers on YouTube showed that the perceived credibility of the content is believed to be one important driver that helps influencers to build their communities (Xiao et al., 2018). The perceived credibility of a certain message influences individuals' attitudes towards that message (Greer, 2003). Thus, it is considered that credible sources are more persuasive than non-credible ones (Ohanian, 1990; Xiao et al., 2018). Trust is an essential component of source credibility (Pornpitakpan, 2004). While credibility refers to the per-

ceived quality of the source, trust refers to the vulnerability of the audience, expressed through beliefs, dispositions, and behaviors determined by the source (Rieh & Danielson, 2007).

Quality of information and persuasiveness (e.g., *authenticity*- consistency in values, attitudes, and behavior; *likeability*– similarity between influencers and followers; *authority*– credible, expertise-based message) are important variables of credibility (Moore, Yang, & Kim 2018). Previous research showed that the informative value of the content positively affects the trust of the users. Moreover, expertise and attractiveness help improve followers' brand awareness (Chen & Yuan, 2018). In line with this, the following hypotheses were stated:

H1. High perceived quality of information of influencers leads to high trustworthiness of the influencers.

H2. High perceived quality of information of influencers leads to a positive attitude towards following the influencers.

Ohanian (1990), by combining the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model, claims that the credibility of an endorsement has three dimensions: the *expertise* dimension (expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified, skilled), the *attractiveness* dimension (attractive, classy, handsome/beautiful, elegant, sexy), the *trustworthiness* dimension (dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, trustworthy). These three dimensions were mentioned in further studies, this time related to the communication of online celebrities or influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Amelina, Dinna & Zhu, 2016). Similarity (perceived likeness of the source to the receiver), as mentioned above as well, is often added as a fourth dimension (Marwick, Fontaine & Boyd, 2017; Munnukka, Uusitalo & Toivonen, 2016).

The trustworthiness of the source, as an effect of information quality, is defined as the willingness to rely on a peer in whom one has confidence (Chen & Yuan, 2018). Studies show that the trustworthiness of influencers has effects on attitudes towards the sponsored brand (Xiao et al., 2018). Trustworthiness is considered the antecedent to trust, which gives individuals confidence, which, in turn, can lead to attitudinal change (Amelina, Dinna & Zhu, 2016). In this respect, previous literature suggests that users may trust influencers as much as they trust their friends (Chen & Yuan, 2018). People trust influencer posts more than brand posts (Johnson, Potocki & Vedhuis, 2019). Our next hypothesis is:

H3. The high trustworthiness of the influencers leads to a positive attitude towards following the influencers.

The moderating role of the frequency of social media use

Relations evolve and so do social media relations. The more frequently people use a social media platform, the more familiar they get with it. Social media influencers are easy to relate to, as they share aspects of their everyday life on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. They create the illusion of a face-to-face relation, generating parasocial interactions. The effect of parasocial interaction on attitudes, which develops over time, was emphasized in several previous studies (Ballantine & Au Yeung, 2015; De Veirman et al., 2017; Choi & Lee, 2017).

Chung and Cho (2017) explored the underlying mechanisms through which the use of social media affects celebrity endorsement effectiveness and found out that on social media,

parasocial interactions with celebrities influence source trustworthiness, which then has a positive effect on brand credibility. The occurrence of parasocial interaction, created through perceived interactivity and openness in (online) communication, has a positive effect on feelings of loyalty and thus on trust. This gives us a reason to believe that the frequency of Instagram and YouTube use, elements that contribute to the development of parasocial interaction, can have a moderating role between the way influencers 'content is perceived (PIQ) and the trustworthiness of the influencers. Taking this into consideration following hypothesis were developed:

H4. The frequency of Instagram use has a moderating effect between PIQ and the trustworthiness of the influencers in the sense that high frequency of use will lead to high trustworthiness of the influencers.

H5. The frequency of YouTube use has a moderating effect between PIQ and the trustworthiness of the influencers, in the sense that high frequency of use will lead to high trustworthiness of the influencers. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model.

Figure 1. Conceptual model.
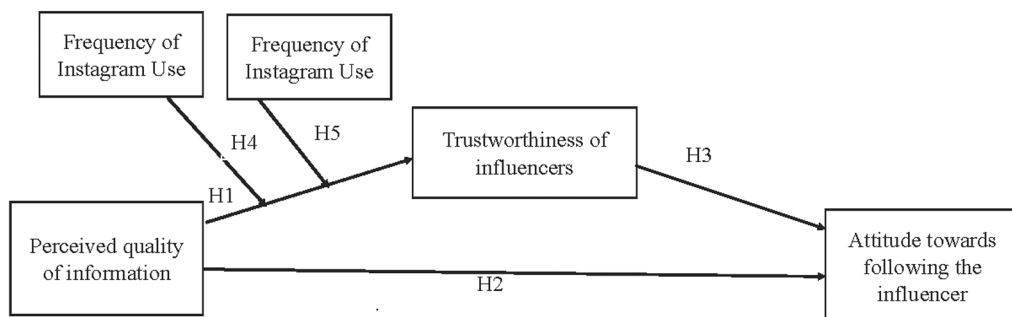
Method

An online survey was conducted in Romania, with $N=1088$ participants. The survey was distributed on social media (Facebook and Instagram) between November 2018 and September 2019. The initial number of respondents was 1207, but only the respondents who have an Instagram account and are YouTube users were included in the final sample. The age range is 16 to 37 ($M = 21.32$, $SD = 2.24$), of which 64.8% are female. In terms of education, the sample consists of 7.1% high school students, 25.8% high school graduates, and 41.4% university graduates.

Measures

As a mediator**,** the trustworthiness of the influencers, a construct that was measured on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 4 = 'strongly agree' ('Influencers are honest','Influencers are trustworthy','Influencers are truthful','Influencers are earnest'), (α = .86, $M = 5.35$, SD = 1.28; Munnukka et al., 2016) was used.

As a moderator, the frequency of Instagram usage was measured by asking participants how often they checked their Instagram accounts (1 = 'never', 2 = 'less than once a month', 3 = 'weekly', 4='every day', 5= 'several times a day'), (M=4.87, SD=.50). For the analysis, the variable was mean-centered.

The second moderator that was tested was the frequency of YouTube usage measured by asking participants how often they used the YouTube page or the YouTube app (1 = 'never', 2 = 'less than once a month', 3 = 'weekly', 4='every day', 5= 'several times a day'), (M=4.19, SD=1.10). For the analysis, the variable was mean-centered.

The outcome variable was the attitude towards following influencers that was measured using five statements (e.g.," It is a good idea to follow influencers on social media") on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 4 = 'strongly agree', (α = .90, M = 3.94, SD = 1.47; adapted from (Karnowski, Leonhard, & Kümpel, 2018).

The audience perception on influencers authenticity was measured using a single item ("In my opinion influencers are authentic.") on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 4 = 'strongly agree' (M=2.19, SD=.74). The perception on influencers similitude to the public or the peer character was measured using a single item ("In my opinion influencers are similar to us.") on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 4 = 'strongly agree' (M=3, SD=.98).

The independent variable, perceived information quality (M=2.30, SD= 0.67, α=.911), is a construct consisting of three dimensions:

Perceived information relevance was measured by asking the participants to assess the following statements: 'The information shared by influencers is relevant to my goals','The information shared by influencers is appropriate for my goals', and 'The information shared by influencers applies to my goals'. All the item response choices used a 4-point Likert scale (1='strongly disagree', 4='strongly agree'); (M=2.08, SD= 0.78, α=.885, after (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017).

Perceived information reliability was measured by asking the participants to assess the following statements: 'The information shared by influencers is reliable', and 'The information shared by influencers can be relied upon'. All the item response choices used a 4-point Likert scale (1='strongly disagree', 4='strongly agree'); (M=2.00, SD=0.71, rsb=.897, after (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017).

Perceived information enjoyability was measured by asking the participants to assess the following statements: 'The information shared by influencers is funny', The information shared by influencers is enjoyable'. All the item response choices used a 4-point Likert scale (1='strongly disagree', 4='strongly agree'); (M=2.80, SD=0.76, rsb=.826, after (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017).

If respondents follow influencers on Instagram was measured based on a single question with "yes" or "no" as answers. The same question was applied for the following of influencers on Instagram.

Results

Data Analysis
To test the proposed hypotheses of the mediating role of the perceived quality of information on the attitude towards following influencers via trustworthiness of the influencers,

two moderated mediation analysis having first the frequency of Instagram usage and second the frequency of YouTube use as mediators was run using Model 7, PROCESS macro 3 in SPSS (Hayes, 2017) employing 1,000 bootstrap samples. In addition to that three moderation analysis using model 4 were run having perceived information relevance, perceived information reliability and perceived information enjoyability as dependent variable.

Findings showed that the perceived quality of information has a significant direct effect on the trustworthiness of the influencers ($b = 0.61$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.58$, $ULCI = 0.64$). All component of the perceived quality of information: relevance ($b = 0.45$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.42$, $ULCI = 0.49$), reliability ($b = 0.55$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.52$, $ULCI = 0.58$), and enjoyability ($b = 0.44$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.41$, $ULCI = 0.47$) have a significant positive impact on the trustworthiness of influencers. This supports the first hypothesis (H1).

The majority of the respondents declared that they follow influencers on Instagram (75.7%). Among the participants, only 48.4% declared that they follow influencers on YouTube. The gender of the respondents didn't influence how they rated the trustworthiness of the influencers (male $M=2.49$, $SD=0.51$; female $M=2.28$, $SD=0.59$). When it comes to age, respondents under 30 years old have higher values of influencers' trustworthiness ($M=3.4$, $SD=0.85$) than respondents under 30 years old ($M=2.39$, $SD=0.56$). There is a significant direct effect of the perceived quality of information ($b = 0.62$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.56$, $ULCI = 0.68$) on the attitude towards following the influencer. The findings support H2. The trustworthiness of the influencers has a significant direct effect on the attitude towards following the influencers ($b = 0.36$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.28$, $ULCI = 0.43$). Furthermore, all component of the perceived quality of information: relevance ($b = 0.65$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.60$, $ULCI = 0.69$), reliability ($b = 0.30$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.24$, $ULCI = 0.36$), and enjoyability ($b = 0.37$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.33$, $ULCI = 0.40$) have a significant positive impact on the trustworthiness of influencers. Thus H3 was supported as well. Direct effects are depicted in figure 2.
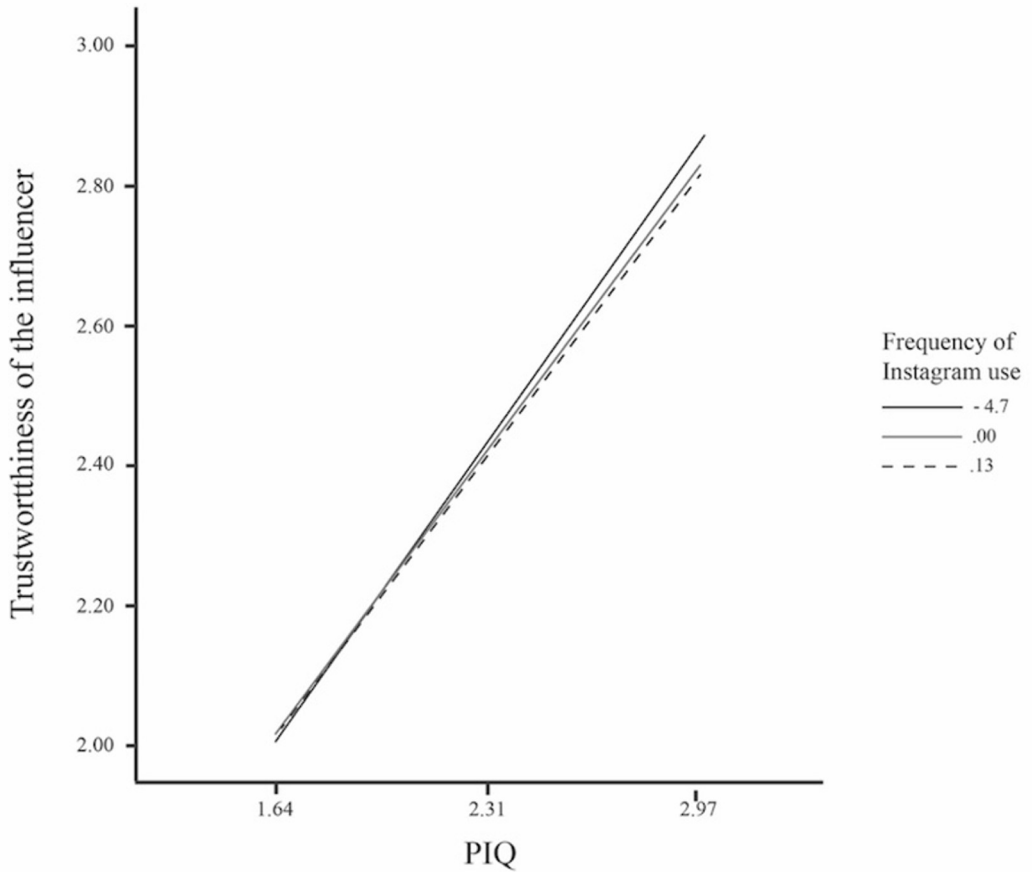
Figure 2. Direct effects.
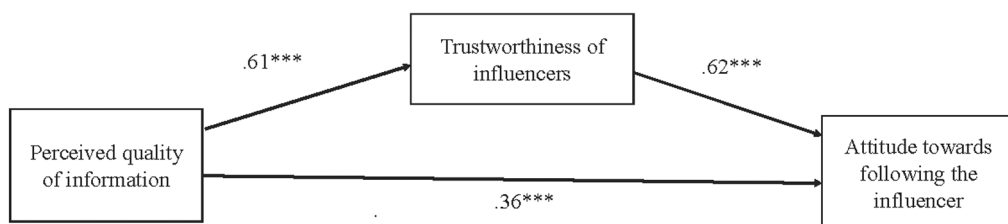
* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.

The frequency of Instagram use also has a significant direct effect on the trustworthiness of the influencers ($b = 0.14$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = 0.005$, $ULCI = 0.27$). The interaction between the perceived quality of information role and the frequency of Instagram use also has a significant direct effect on the trustworthiness of the influencers ($b = -0.07$, $p = .04$, $LLCI = -0.14$, $ULCI = -0.005$). The index of moderated mediation was significant ($Index = -0.03$, $BootSE= 0.011$, $BootLLCI = -0.05$, $BootULCI = -0.005$). As hypothesized (H4), the frequency of Instagram use moderates the relationship between the perceived quality of information and the trustworthiness of the influencer (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Moderating effects of the frequency of Instagram use

The frequency of the YouTube use has no significant direct effect on the trustworthiness of the influencers ($b = -0.03$, $p = .38$, $LLCI = -0.10$, $ULCI = 0.04$). The interaction between the perceived quality of information and the frequency of YouTube use has no significant direct effect on the trustworthiness of the influencers ($b = 0.02$, $p = .18$, $LLCI = -0.01$, $ULCI = 0.05$). The index of moderated mediation was not significant (*Index* = 0.01, *BootSE* = 0.007, *BootLLCI* = -0.005, *BootULCI* = 0.022). This is contrary to H5, the frequency of the YouTube use has no moderating role between the perceived quality of information and the trustworthiness of the influencers.

The moderated mediation pathway of perceived quality of information moderated by the frequency of Instagram use via trustworthiness of the influencers on the attitude towards following influencers was significant ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $LLCI = -0.05$, $ULCI = -0.005$). This result does not support the fourth hypothesis (H4). The results showed that high frequency of Instagram use will lead to low trustworthiness in influencers.

The findings showed that there is no moderated mediation pathway of perceived quality of information by the frequency of YouTube use via the trustworthiness of the influencers on the attitude towards following influencers ($b = 0.007$, $SE = 0.007$, $LLCI = -0.004$, $ULCI =$

0.02). There is no moderation role of the frequency of YouTube use either. This goes against the expectations formulated in H5. Additional information in table 1 in the annex.

Adding to the previous findings, it is interesting to look at how the respondents rated the authenticity of the influencers: 15.9% consider that influencers are not at all authentic, 53.4% consider that influencer are only in a small degree authentic, 26.8% consider that they are in a high degree authentic and 3.9% in a verry high degree authentic. Influencers have a peer status in the perception of the respondents: 35.1% consider influencers to be similar to them in a very high degree and 40.5% in a high degree. Only 21.9% consider that influencers are not similar to them and 2.5% consider that influencers are not at all similar to them. Linear regressions applied proved that the perceived authenticity (R^2=.335, b=.57, SE=.02, $p < .001$) and perceived similarity (R^2=.036, b=.14, SE=.02, $p < .001$) significantly affects the intention to follow the influencers.

Discussion

The present study can contribute to understanding the mechanism behind predicting the relevant elements of users' online behavior: the intention to follow influencers. Our three research questions were found an answer. The results underline the role of perceived information quality (namely perceived relevance, reliability, and enjoyability of the information) and of the trustworthiness of the influencers on the attitude towards following the influencers (Xiao et al., 2018). All elements of perceived quality of information are important. Instagram and YouTube users that perceive the content generated by influencers as being relevant for them, consider following these influencers. The findings are in line with previous studies that underlined that quality content will lead to high trustworthiness of the influencers and thus, to the effectiveness of the content creator (Chen & Yuan, 2018). The findings are consistent with previous literature emphasizing that influencers need to be beyond their self-presentation and produce perceived quality content. The perceived authenticity of the influencers is a strong predictor when it comes to users' online behavior to follow influencers (Audrezet et al., 2020). Perceived similarity also affects the following behavior, but not that strong as perceived authenticity. Users understand that from a certain level, influencers tend to be celebrities are the similarity element is not that much relevant.

The study pointed out the endorser, content creator, and community manager advertising functions, of social media influencers according to Campbell and Farrell (2020). Thus, content that is relevant, reliable, and enjoyable for the audience will be appreciated by the influencers' followers and subscribers. Old followers on Instagram will continue to follow the influencers and new followers will join the community. The high trustworthiness of the influencer will add to this relationship and, according to the literature, will contribute to a long term relationship between the influencers and their followers (Liu et al., 2015).

The intention of the study was to determine if the frequency of Instagram use and that of YouTube use have positive moderating roles in the relationship between perceived information quality and trustworthiness. The study assumed that people who use Instagram more often and perceive the information shared by influencers to be high-quality information will consider influencers to be trustworthy. The frequency of Instagram use has a small moderating role. The analysis of simple slope indicates a negative relationship between perceived quality of information and the trustworthiness of the influencers for a high frequency of In-

stagram use (Fig. 3). The frequency of YouTube use does not affect the trustworthiness of influencers. This can be explained by the fact that there is a difference in the way people use Instagram and YouTube: it is more accessible and more widespread to follow an influencer on Instagram than to subscribe to an influencer's channel on YouTube. People are also used to watching YouTube videos without necessarily subscribing to some particular channels. If you do not follow an influencer on Instagram, you are not able to receive his/her stories or posts in your feed, unless you encounter a sponsored post or a sponsored story of that influencer. It is not common practice to always search for a particular influencer on the Instagram app. On the contrary, on YouTube, a simple search can reveal the latest video of a particular YouTuber. This might explain why the frequency of Instagram use has a moderating role and the frequency of YouTube use has no moderating role.

Conclusions

The findings articulate an answer to the research questions of the present study. The main conclusion is that influencers who want to grow their audiences have to create perceived quality content for their audiences. This can contribute to both positive attitudes and the development of trust. Furthermore, as previous research underlined, the trustworthiness of influencers is a relevant asset for their activity as persuasive communicators. Trustworthiness can also contribute to the development of a long-term relationship with the audience. This is important, bearing in mind how easy it is to unfollow an influencer. The perceived authenticity and the perceived similarity of the influencers contribute to their effort to build strong communities of followers.

The present study has sought to find an answer to the question of what determines users to follow influencers on Instagram and YouTube. The authors are aware of the complexity of the relationship between influencers and their audiences and the aspects that where discussed are only some of the elements of this relationship. The moderating role of Instagram and YouTube usage was explored, and the results showed that there is a limited influence on Instagram and no influence on YouTube. Nonetheless, input from other social network sites could be examined in the future. The topic of influencer credibility could be further approached using experimental designs, either transverse or, even better, longitudinal, trying to identify patterns of change in followers' attitudes, intentions, and behavior.

The authors are aware of the limitations of the study. The conceptual model was developed based only on the perceived quality of information and the degree of trustworthiness in determining whether to follow an influencer, the attractiveness of the source was not taken into account, as a component of source credibility. These limitations notwithstanding, the present study contributes to a better understanding of the complex mechanism of influencer marketing in a constantly changing social media environment. Another limitation consists in the sample that results from the online data collection. The study was not applied with the support of a data collection company, nor with a panel.

The study operated with the concept of perceived information quality that means what the audiences considered to be quality information. Future research can also include qualitative research to add an in-depth perspective of how followers and subscribers defined the quality of information. Finding the balance between advertising and non-advertising content pub-

lished by influencers on social media in order not to lose their communities is also an interesting perspective to explore in the future.

The results of the present research have also practical implications for both marketers and influencers. Since the trustworthiness in an influencer plays an important role in the relationship between the perceived quality of information and the attitude towards following the influencer, consistent with previous research, instead of concentrating on engagement metrics, brands might place more attention on the selection of influencers who are perceived as more trustworthy.

Meaningful recommendations for influencers arise from the present study, as influencers can choose to emphasize qualitative feedback from followers alongside analyzed quantitative data, residing in shares and likes. They can also choose to concentrate more on long-term objectives of building a network of trust among their followers instead of the short-term efficacy of influencer marketing campaigns. While information plays a vast role in influencing behavior, the agent that delivers the message has a sensitive responsibility.

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Annex

Table 1

	Trustwothiness		Attitude	
	b	SE	b	SE
PQI	0.61***	0.017	0.62 ***	0.03
Trustwothiness			0.36 ***	0.04
Frecquency of Instagram use	0.14 *	0.07		
Interaction 1	-0.07 *	0.03		
Frecquency of Youtube use	-0.03	0.04		
Interaction 2	0.02	0.01		
Explained variance	.56		.62	

Note: Macro PROCESS 3, Model 9 with 1,000 bootstrap sample; $N = 1088$.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; PQI= perceived quality of information.