

## The Trust in Influencers in The Beauty Industry Based On the Example of Generation Z\*

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\* Presented at the 41<sup>st</sup> IBIMA International Conference, 26-27 June 2023, Granada, Spain  
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### Abstract

The objective of this article is to identify the perception of beauty influencers on Instagram by generation Z. The motive behind the study was to fill the research gap, which became apparent after conducting a literature review. The trust factor, considering the SCOPUS database, has not been explored before, particularly from the viewpoint of Generation Z. All the discussed studies were conducted in international markets and involved influencers or focus groups in those regions. However, no study has taken into consideration the Polish market so far. In order to realise the indicated objective, an empirical study was conducted, using an online survey technique, supported by a questionnaire on a sample of 123 individuals selected purposefully, chosen according to age and being part of Generation Z. The study focused on attitudes and opinions about beauty influencers and their activities. In the analysis of the results, it was found that attitudes towards beauty influencers are neutral (ratings fluctuated around the middle of the scale studied). Moreover, representatives of generation Z declared, on average, about 14 times logging into the app per day, which together accounted for about 1.7 hours of daily use of the app. It also turned out that women spent significantly more time on the Instagram platform than men and substantially more often relied on beauty influencers' recommendations than men.

**Keywords:** influencer marketing, beauty influencer, generation Z, gen Z, Instagram, SNS

### Introduction

Social media has become an important choice for the majority of consumers around the world (Łaszkiewicz, 2022). It is estimated that social media is used by approximately 59.4% (about 4.76 billion people worldwide) of the total population of over 8 billion (Datareportal, 2023). As the main reasons for using social media, users most often list keeping in touch with friends and family, then filling spare time, subsequently reading news stories. Social media content can be generated by individual users who can recommend various types of products without any brand rewarding those efforts (Smith et al., 2023). Such users simply want to share their opinion with their group of followers. The second type of creators in social media are influencers – influential people who are hired by companies

to promote products or brands to their group of followers on specific digital platform (Tanwar et al., 2021). Influencers are characterized by the fact that they are specialists in a particular field and share their knowledge, opinions, recommendations with others as part of their online activities (Ozuem & Ranfagni, 2021). Influencers can be classified due to the categories of content they share on their social media platforms, the level of authenticity or engagement of their audience. However, the most commonly used criterion for classification is the number of followers. Campbell and Farrell (2020) distinguished:

- celebrities/mega-influencers, creators with more than a million followers
- macro-influencers are those with between 100,000 and 1 million followers
- micro-influencers, have between 10,000 and 100,000 fans
- nano-influencers are creators with the smallest group of observers - less than 10,000

Usually depending on the number of followers an influencer has the opportunity to embark on more lucrative partnerships with brands. Influencers gather their audience in the social networks through which they communicate with them. In this article, it has been decided to consider one of the most important social media platforms – Instagram (Caliandro & Graham, 2020), because among all social networking sites, this one is experiencing the most rapid growth in influencer marketing. (Oberlo, 2022). Instagram is a platform created primarily to share photos. Every day, an impressive number of 95 million photos and videos are shared on Instagram, as reported by Wordstream (Lister, 2022). Now, typically influencers on Instagram present their content in the form of visually captivating images or videos accompanied by embedded elements and a descriptive text (Sokolova&Kefi, 2020).

Furthermore, Hootsuite (2023) reports that Instagram is the most popular social media platform among Generation Z. The majority of the app's users are aged between 18 and 29 (Wordstream, 2022). Therefore, this article specifically targets and prioritizes the aforementioned group that uses the app most often and is most familiar with. Instagram is an app designed to share photos and short video content (Moon et al., 2016), and the available features, such as digital filters that allow users to rework photos, encourage people to share their own content. Instagram's main purpose was for users to share good-looking, edited pictures (BBC, 2018), so not surprisingly the beauty content began to grow on it. Influencer marketing has been widely embraced by the beauty industry, establishing itself as one of the forefront sectors in this marketing strategy (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). Consumers are particularly interested in beauty influencer content on Instagram because the messages are designed in the form of photos or short, snappy and aesthetically pleasing videos (Forbes, 2019).

The article is based on primary and secondary sources. To begin with, the authors conducted an extensive review of existing literature sourced from the SCOPUS database, industry blogs, and reports. Following that, the researchers carried out their own empirical study using the diagnostic survey method, involving a sample of 123 respondents.

## Literature Review

The most recent development in influencer marketing, apart from influencer PR packages, affiliate codes, branded content, and co-branding, is the promotion of beauty influencer products, which has gained significant buzz within the industry (Evers&Daalmans, 2021). Beauty influencers are people who provide information about cosmetics and beauty products through social media (Siti et al., 2019). They are inseparable from the cosmetics industry, which is widely regarded as one of the most promising sectors in today's market, whose revenue in the beauty and personal care market amounts to 571.10 US billion dollars in 2023 (Statista, 2023). People tend to trust influential beauty influencers on Instagram more, especially if they have had a positive experience with an influencer previously (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). The group that has the most trust in influencers is the generation Z, which values online influencers for building relationships with customers and their unbiased opinions (Insense, 2023).

Generation Z, otherwise known as Gen Z, iGeneration or postmillennials, represents people who were born between 1995 and 2012 (Berhate&Dirani, 2022). This generation is currently the most numerous - over 2 billion people belong to it (Dadic, 2022). Generation Z is characterized by the fact that its individuals grew up having access to technology, which influenced their personalities (Vincent&Tamba, 2022). An integral part of iGen's life is the Internet, where they can obtain information instantly, as well as social media, which are more important to them than traditional media (Saulite&Ščeuļovs, 2022). In the United States, more than half (58%) of the z-generation uses social media 4 or more hours a day, at a rate nearly double that of all American adults (28%) (Briggs, 2022). Gen Z is also distinguished by its approach to communicating with brands. They expect CSR activities, recognition and uniqueness. They prefer video as a form of communication and advertising content (Zatwarnicka-Madura, et al., 2022).

Table 1 presents the steps taken in the literature review process which includes SCOPUS database. The starting point was the choice of keywords: "influencer" and "beauty". Then narrowed the searches to specific fields such as Social Sciences, Business, Management, Accounting and Psychology. Then focus on research articles and reviews. Another criterion for selection was language, in this case English and stage of publication. The next step was to analyse the abstracts. It was taken into consideration whether the articles described or explored the issue of trust among beauty influencers. Eventually 4 articles qualified for the review.

**Table 1. Literature review**

| Process |   | Number of records |
|---------|---|-------------------|
| Step 1  | “Influencer” AND “beauty”   | 117               |
| Step 2  | Papers in fields: Social Sciences, Business, Management, Accounting, Psychology | 89                |
| Step 3  | Papers as research articles and review  | 77                |
| Step 4  | Paper in English  | 73                |
| Step 5  | Papers final published  | 66                |
| Step 6  | Total number of papers after screening abstracts                                | 4                 |

Source: Own elaboration based on SCOPUS database.

Not many researchers have studied the trust factor in the context of beauty influencers. Filieri, et al. (2022) explored the trust component in addition to other factors, but only using the example of the 10 most popular mega-influencers on YouTube in the beauty industry identified by Forbes magazine. Also, only women aged 18-25 were surveyed. The study developed by Djafarova&Matson (2021) examined potential credibility factors, including trust towards beauty influencers on Instagram and YouTube. The study included a survey of 24 profiles of selected micro-influencers. The selection was based on the ranking of beauty influencers in Forbes magazine, the "Explore" feature on Instagram and "Recommended" on the YouTube platform. Other studies conducted in Brazil have addressed specific qualities of bloggers that generate enough interest for their observers to become loyal followers. The research was conducted through one-on-one interviews and a focus group, examined the impact of the perceived usefulness of a blogger's recommendations, the blog reader's trust in them and the reputation of bloggers on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Costa et al., 2021). The topic of trust was also discussed by Dekavalla (2020). The author focused on the transparency of influencers as a major factor in gaining trust among the audience. The research focused on the fashion and beauty industries on the YouTube platform and was conducted in the UK. The article presented the outcomes of a qualitative thematic analysis conducted on individual videos by three British YouTubers. Within these videos, the creators extensively delve into their experiences collaborating with brands, providing insightful discussions on the process.

The review of existing literature revealed a notable research gap regarding the exploration of the trust factor specifically from the viewpoint of Generation Z consumers' opinions. All of the discussed studies were carried out in international markets, involving influencers or focus groups in those regions. However, no study has been conducted on the Polish market so far. The perceived research gap led the authors to formulate the following research questions.

Research questions:

- RQ1: How often and how much time do Generation Z representatives spend on the Instagram?
- RQ2: What is the trust of Generation Z representatives in relation to Beauty Influencers?
- RQ3: Does frequency of use, time spent on Instagram and trust in Beauty Influencers vary by gender and respondent's place of residence?

## Procedure

The research was conducted by using an online survey technique supported by a questionnaire prepared in the Microsoft Forms software and completed in December 2022. Purposive sampling of individuals for the study was used, where the selection category was age, belonging to Generation Z. A total of 132 responses were obtained. However, 9 of the responses were rejected due to filling mistakes and missing responses. Ultimately, 123 responses were included in further analyses. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: a main and a metric. In the main part, respondents were asked, among other things, about the amount of time they spend on the Instagram app, the number of logins to the Instagram app or their level of trust in Beauty Influencers. In the metric part, respondents were asked about their gender and place of residence.

## Sample

The research group is majority women (72.4% of respondents), the rest - men (27.6%). 53.7% of respondents lived in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, 7.3% declared that they live in cities with 150,001 to 500,000 inhabitants, 11.4% live in cities with 50,001 to 150,000 inhabitants, the rest - 27.6% of respondents live in small towns or villages (9.8% and 17.9% respectively).

## Results

To answer research questions RQ1 and RQ2, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were analysed for the variables indicated. The results are presented in the table below.

**Table 2. Mean responses of respondents of the study group in relation to the variables studied (n=123).**

|   | Mean  | Standard deviation |
|---|-------|--------------------|
| Daily mean frequency of Instagram use   | 13,78 | 18,402             |
| Daily mean time spent on Instagram in hours   | 1,70  | 1,264              |
| I trust beauty influencers that I follow on Instagram                                     | 3,28  | 1,008              |
| I rely on beauty influencers recommendations when I want to buy a beauty-related product. | 2,97  | 1,162              |
| Beauty influencers on Instagram are trustworthy   | 3,01  | 0,966              |

Notes: To the statements: "I trust beauty influencers that I follow on Instagram", "I rely on beauty influencers recommendations when I want to buy a beauty-related product" and "Beauty influencers on Instagram are trustworthy", respondents had to relate on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "strongly disagree, while 5 meant "strongly agree".

Source: Empirical research.

The respondents declared logging in to the Instagram app on average around 14 times a day (M=13.78, SD=18.402). The daily average time of which was M=1.70, SD=1.264 hours. Respondents positively relate to the statement "I trust beauty influencers that I follow on Instagram" M=3.28, SD=1.008. Other trust statements such as "I rely on beauty influencers recommendations when I want to buy a beauty-related product" and "Beauty influencers on Instagram are trustworthy" were neutrally perceived by the survey group representatives, M=2.97, SD=1.162 and M=3.01, SD=0.966 respectively.

To answer research question RQ3, tests of significance of differences were carried out. As the requirements for at least the equality of the subgroups tested or the normality of the distribution were not met, it was decided to use non-parametric methods. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to test for gender differences, while the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used for residence.

**Table 3. The p-value statistic of tests of significance for differences in study variables in relation to gender and place of residence (n=123).**

|   | Gender | Place of residence |
|---|--------|--------------------|
| Daily mean frequency of Instagram use   | 0,364  | 0,152              |
| Daily mean time spent on Instagram in hours   | <0,001 | 0,277              |
| I trust beauty influencers that I follow on Instagram                                     | 0,291  | 0,898              |
| I rely on beauty influencers recommendations when I want to buy a beauty-related product. | 0,008  | 0,879              |
| Beauty influencers on Instagram are trustworthy   | 0,170  | 0,639              |

Notes: To the statements: "I trust beauty influencers that I follow on Instagram", "I rely on beauty influencers recommendations when I want to buy a beauty-related product" and "Beauty influencers on Instagram are trustworthy", respondents had to relate on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "strongly disagree, while 5 meant "strongly agree".

Source: Empirical research.

The tests of differences with the independent variable - place of residence identified no significant differences for: daily logins to the app H=6.719, p=0.152, average time spent H=5.107, p=0.277, or statements related to trust in Beauty Influencers: "I trust beauty influencers that I follow on Instagram" H=1.077, p=0.898, "I rely on beauty influencers recommendations when I want to buy a beauty-related product". H=1.197, p=0.879, "Beauty influencers on Instagram are trustworthy" H=2.531, p=0.639.

However, significant differences were found in terms of respondents' gender with regard to average daily time spent on Instagram U=2246.500, p<0.001 - women (M=1.98, SD=1.337) spent significantly more time on the Instagram app than men (M=1.05, SD=0.737) and for the statement "I rely on beauty influencers recommendations when I want to buy a beauty-related product" U=2722.500, p=0.008 - women (M=3.09, SD=1.143) had significantly higher attitudes towards this statement than men (M=1.86, SD=0.690). The other variables tested showed no significant gender differences - 'Daily mean frequency of Instagram use' U=1588.000, p=0.364, 'I trust beauty influencers that I follow on Instagram' U=290.500, p=0.291, 'Beauty influencers on Instagram are trustworthy' U=310.000, p=0.170.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Regarding the formulated research questions, in terms of the answer to the first question RQ1 - it was found that for the surveyed group of respondents coming from generation Z, the average time spent on the site is about 2h, averaging

14 times a day. While there are few reports where the time spent on individual platforms is reported, in the case of time spent in the social media space in general, the time spent is between an average of 2 hours and 48 minutes (BusinessDIT, 2023) and even more than 4 hours each day (Later, 2023). In terms of frequency, 62% of Generation Z representatives declare daily use of the Instagram app (EarthWeb, 2023). The empirical study conducted confirmed these results and even managed to establish a certain frequency of daily logins, which is 14 on average.

In terms of responses to research question RQ2, the results of the survey, where respondents were asked to address confidence statements in relation to Beauty Influencers, are rather neutral (the average response was around 3). The reason for this result may be the low awareness of this phenomenon and the rather small market in the case of the surveyed country. The trend towards Beauty Influencers has developed especially in the USA and is slowly becoming active in Europe.

In terms of exploring the relationship between the phenomena under study and the gender of the respondents and their place of residence (RQ3). Relationships were shown specifically in terms of gender. Women spend significantly more time on Instagram than men and significantly rely more on recommendations from Beauty Influencers. This situation may be due to the fact that more women follow Influencers on social media than men (Fohr, 2023), which may be related to greater awareness and a more positive attitude towards this form of communication.

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into Generation Z's perceptions of beauty influencers on Instagram. Understanding the attitudes and preferences of this demographic towards beauty influencers is crucial for marketers, influencers themselves, and society at large. By recognizing the power and influence wielded by beauty influencers and addressing the concerns raised by Generation Z, stakeholders can foster a more authentic, transparent, and mutually beneficial relationship between influencers and their followers.

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