



**UNIVERSITY OFTM
KWAZULU-NATAL**

**INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**Impact of influencer marketing on University of KwaZulu-Natal students' perceptions
of brands and purchase behaviour**

By

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of Master of Commerce Marketing Management**

School of Management, Information Technology and Governance

Discipline of Marketing and Supply Chain Management

College of Law and Management Studies

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DECLARATION

I, **Gareth Daniel Paul**, declare that

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour from a University of KwaZulu-Natal student perspective. This study uncovered the effect that influencer marketing has on attitudes towards brands, brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, perceived brand quality and brand switching. It further investigated students' perceptions of influencer credibility and influencer marketing's impact on students' purchase behaviour. This research was crucial as there is a small pool of studies that have been done in this area of research from a South African perspective. It also aimed to determine whether influencer marketing enhances brand appeal of products and services and to assess influencer credibility and the impact of influencer attributes on consumers' purchase intentions and brand perceptions. The factors that were focused on under this theory are attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise/skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise of influencers. Consumer decision-making and the influence on consumer purchases through eWOM and effective online brand content during the Covid-19 pandemic was also explored. A sample of size of 306 students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Westville Campus was drawn using the convenience sampling technique. The data was collected through online questionnaires, which were analysed accordingly using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the study showed that there was a significantly positive relationship between the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, in creating brand equity, on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of electronic word of mouth through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Recommendations from the results of the study provide insights for businesses into how creative influencer marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagements with university students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	2
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	3
1.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY.....	4
1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY	4
1.6 AIM AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	5
1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	6
1.8 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY	7
1.9 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	7
1.10 SUMMARY OUTLINE PER CHAPTER.....	8
1.11 CONCLUSION.....	9
CHAPTER TWO	10

LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	10
2.2 BACKGROUND OF INFLUENCER MARKETING	10
2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND PLATFORMS.....	13
2.3.1 Instagram	16
2.3.2 YouTube	16
2.3.3 Facebook.....	17
2.3.4 Pinterest.....	17
2.3.5 Snapchat	18
2.3.6 Twitter.....	18
2.3.7 TikTok.....	19
2.3.8 WhatsApp.....	19
2.3.9 LinkedIn	20
2.4 ADVANTAGES OF INFLUENCER MARKETING	20
2.5 DEMERITS OF INFLUENCER MARKETING	21
2.6 THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF BRANDS.....	22
2.6.1 The effect of influencer marketing on consumer attitudes towards brands	22
2.6.2 The effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity	23
2.6.3 The impact of influencer marketing on consumer decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour	27
2.7 TYPES OF INFLUENCERS.....	28

2.7.1 Nano-influencer	28
2.7.2 Micro-influencer	29
2.7.3 Macro-influencer	29
2.7.4 Mega-influencer	29
2.7.5 Celebrity influencer	29
2.8 INFLUENCER CREDIBILITY	30
2.8.1 Attractiveness	31
2.8.2 Trustworthiness.....	31
2.8.3 Expertise/skills	32
2.8.4 Homophily/similarity.....	33
2.8.5 Popularity	34
2.8.6 Product expertise	34
2.8.7 The impact of influencer credibility on purchasing decisions	35
2.9 THE EFFECT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR.....	36
2.9.1 Consumer Decision-making Process	37
2.9.2 Effectiveness of brand communication content of influencers on social media on consumer purchase decisions.....	40
2.9.3 Influence of eWOM through content sharing on social media on consumer purchase decisions	42
2.9.4 Effectiveness of influencer marketing on purchase decisions during the covid-19 pandemic	43
2.10 CONCLUSION.....	49

CHAPTER THREE	50
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	50
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	50
3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT	50
3.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	51
3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH APPROACH/PARADIGM.....	52
3.5 STUDY SITE	53
3.6 TARGET POPULATION	53
3.7 SAMPLE	53
3.8 SAMPLING METHOD	54
3.9 SAMPLE SIZE	56
3.10 DATA COLLECTION	57
3.10.1 Source of data.....	57
3.10.2 Questionnaires	57
3.10.3 Construction of the questionnaire.....	58
3.10.4 In-house pretesting and pilot testing.....	59
3.11 DATA QUALITY CONTROL.....	59
3.11.1 Validity	59
3.11.2 Reliability.....	60
3.12 DATA ANALYSIS.....	60
3.12.1 Descriptive statistics	61

3.12.2 Inferential statistics	63
3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	65
3.14 CONCLUSION.....	66
CHAPTER FOUR.....	67
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS	67
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	67
4.2 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS.....	68
4.2.1 Descriptive statistics	68
4.2.2 Inferential statistics	94
4.3 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE	109
4.3.1 Validity of the questionnaire.....	110
4.3.2 Reliability of the questionnaire	113
4.4 CONCLUSION.....	114
CHAPTER FIVE	115
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS.....	115
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	115
5.2 UKZN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE KEY DIMENSIONS OF THE STUDY	115
5.2.1 The impact of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands .	116
5.2.2 The impact of influencer credibility on students' purchasing decisions.....	120
5.2.3 The effect of influencer marketing on UKZN students' purchasing decisions	123

5.3. SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY	126
5.4 CONCLUSION.....	131
CHAPTER SIX	132
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	132
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	132
6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY	132
6.2.1 The impact of influencer marketing on students’ perceptions of brands.....	132
6.2.2 The impact of influencer credibility on students’ purchasing decisions.....	136
6.2.3 The effect of influencer marketing on UKZN students’ purchasing decisions	136
6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	140
6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	140
6.5 CONCLUSION.....	141
REFERENCES.....	xv
APPENDICES	liii
APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT	liii
APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE	lvi
APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL.....	lxi
APPENDIX 4: EDITING CERTIFICATE	lxii

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Reasons for Following Influencers.....	12
Figure 2.2: Preferred social media platforms of Generation Y and Z.....	14
Figure 2.3: Favourite Social Media Platforms to Interact with Influencers	15
Figure 2.4: Types of Influencers	28
Figure 2.5: Consumer Decision-Making Process	37
Figure 4.1: Composition of Sample: Gender	70
Figure 4.2: Composition of Sample: Age	70
Figure 4.3: Composition of Sample: Race.....	71
Figure 4.4: Composition of Sample: Educational Level.....	71
Figure 4.5: Composition of Sample: College	72
Figure 6.1: Recommendations for the effective use of influencer marketing when targeting university students	139

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Favourite Social Media Platforms to Interact with Influencers.....	15
Table 3.1: University of KwaZulu-Natal, Institutional Intelligence Reports: Student Registration by College and Campus (2022).....	54
Table 3.2: Probability and Non-Probability Sampling Designs.....	55
Table 3.3: Population-to-Sample Size Table.....	56
Table 4.1: Frequency Distribution of Biographical Variables.....	69
Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics: Key Dimensions of the Study	73
Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items.....	75
– Dimension 1	75
Table 4.3 (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 1	76
Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2 ..	77
Table 4.4: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2	78
Table 4.4: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2	79
Table 4.4: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2	80
Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items.....	81
– Dimension 3	81
Table 4.5 (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 3	82
Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4 ..	83
Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4	84
Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4	85
Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4	86

Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4.....	87
Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 5.....	88
Table 4.7: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 5.....	89
Table 4.7: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 5.....	90
Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 6.....	91
Table 4.8: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 6.....	92
Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 7.....	92
Table 4.9: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 7.....	93
Table 4.9: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 7.....	94
Table 4.10: Correlation: Key Dimensions of the Study.....	95
Table 4.11: Mann-Whitney U-Test: Key Dimensions of the Study and Gender.....	99
Table 4.12: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Gender.....	100
Table 4.13: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and Age.....	101
Table 4.14: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Age.....	102
Table 4.15: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and Race.....	103
Table 4.16: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Race.....	104
Table 4.17: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and Educational Level.....	105
Table 4.18: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Education level.....	106
Table 4.19: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and College.....	107
Table 4.20: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and College.....	108
Table 4.20: (Continued): Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and College.....	109
Table 4.21: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity.....	110
Table 4.22: Validity of Questionnaire: Factor Analysis.....	110
Table 4.22: (Continued): Validity of Questionnaire: Factor Analysis.....	111
Table 4.23: Overall Reliability of the Questionnaire: Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha.....	113
Table 4.24: Overall Reliability of the Questionnaire: Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha.....	113

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is one of the most effective strategies in digital marketing because it purports to ensure the success of businesses in building trust and credibility and boosts brand awareness through messages conveyed, creating customer patronage towards brands and subsequently contributing to profitability (Duffett & Maraule, 2024; Kl, 2019; Rihan, 2016). Influencer marketing can also be described as organisations sponsoring social media content creators (influencers) in representing brands, as well as obtaining related feedback about the company, brands, quality of products and/or services from their large social media fan bases (Foster, 2022; Kl, 2019).

Businesses have become more aware of the powerful tool that influencer marketing is on social platforms in inciting behaviour change of consumers and affecting their opinions (Foster, 2022). Vaidya and Karnawat (2023) further state that this has especially been the case, in the last three years and has, therefore, shown a significant increase in the allocation of budgets towards this marketing strategy. Marketers have also observed that consumer interests on social media have shifted from text and images to videos which enhances the ability of social media influencers (SMIs) ability to connect with consumers even further (Jayasinghe, 2020). This has resulted in the average marketer doubling the organisation's investment in influencer marketing since 2019, most especially on Instagram which fits the profile of video posts (El Qudsi, 2022; Jayasinghe, 2020). However, there is a lack of research with regards to the impact of influencer marketing and the usage of this successful tool for local businesses during the global pandemic in South Africa relative to other countries (Greenfield, 2021; Guptaa, 2021; Joshi et al., 2023). There is also a lack of research on the impact that influencer marketing has on consumers' perceptions of brands and purchasing patterns from a South African perspective (Geyser, 2022; Singhania et al., 2021).

This study focused on the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' perception of brands and purchase behaviour, from a university student perspective. In addition, this study focused on the impact of influencer credibility and factors related to consumer decision-making, such as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and the impactions of the COVID-19 pandemic on

purchase decisions of university students. Lastly, this study focused on uncovering marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The influencer marketing strategy has existed for many decades before its growth on digital media and was initially used in traditional media advertising where celebrities and opinion leaders would collaborate with organisations to promote brands (Elli, 2017). The use of influencer marketing on digital platforms currently has a significant impact on consumers' perceptions of brands, more especially in its contribution towards brand admiration and brand attitudes through the choice of an expert influencer in the product category for communication about the brand (Hake et al., 2023; Trivedi & Sama 2020).

Furthermore, Elli (2017) states that the use of average people that have a significant fan base on social media, as opposed to using celebrities as marketing influencers, has the ability to create greater trust and influencer credibility owing to the influencer's passion for these brands and constant communication. This allows influencers to form parasocial, friend-like relationships with consumers. Over time these parasocial relationships form emotional bonds and trigger emotional responses which enhance consumer trust and the credibility of influencers further (Liu, 2021).

Studies further show that companies in various countries that had applied an online marketing strategy and had a social media presence, were less impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown period because of the enhanced consumer experience and service delivery through this channel (Akram et al., 2023; Hake et al., 2023; Itliong, 2020). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) that influencers generate plays a major role in these online strategies as it provides customer service, two-way communication and has helped to maintain customer purchases despite the restricted physical contact between consumers and sellers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wandoko & Panggati, 2022). Businesses can further integrate the feedback from eWOM into their existing strategies and use this platform as a very powerful tool to grow and ensure success in customers' loyalty to brands owing to their satisfaction and repeat purchases (Abuhashesh, 2014).

Letko (2019) states that influencer marketing is still revolutionary because it is gaining traction as a social media marketing strategy, especially with Generation Z consumers. Generation Z/iGeneration are consumers born in 1996 or later (university students) (Csobanka, 2016;

Letko, 2019). These consumers have constant communication on social media platforms, alongside shopping and are very technologically dependent due to the conveniences that it provides (Csobanka, 2016; Letko, 2019).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

International studies have found that influencer marketing plays a major role in creating a large consumer following for a brand, brand awareness, creating demand for a product and even influencing a consumer's purchase intention (Hannu & Johannisson, 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). However, there is a lack of contemporary studies conducted in relation to the impact of influencer marketing on consumer perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour from a university student perspective (Geysler, 2022; Greenfield, 2021). This study aimed to fill this gap in knowledge by investigating the impact of influencer marketing on brand attitudes, brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, perceived brand quality and brand switching from a university student perspective. Furthermore, the trustworthiness and credibility of an influencer alongside electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on social media play a major role in influencing consumers' purchase intent, more especially during the COVID-19 pandemic with most consumers adapting to online purchases (Le & Hoang, 2020; Mastercard, 2020; Sosanuy et al., 2021). However, to date, a paucity of research exists in the roles that influencer credibility and eWOM on social media have on consumer purchase intent and the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmad et al., 2021; Geysler, 2022; West, 2020). This study then contributes to the body of knowledge and fills this gap by exploring the impact of influencer credibility, eWOM and online content that influencers created during the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer purchases from a university student perspective.

Studies have further shown that Generation Z, has proven to be the most lucrative target market in response to marketing strategies such as social media influencer advertising (Letko, 2019; Sophic Capital, 2022). This study, therefore, uncovered the impact of influencer marketing on consumer perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour of University of KwaZulu-Natal students. Furthermore, this study effectively uncovered creative influencer marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students.

1.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study adds to the body of knowledge related to influencer marketing which is crucial since there are not many studies that have been done from a South African university student perspective (Geysler, 2022; Greenfield, 2021; Singhanian et al., 2021). This study helps marketers to understand the impact of influencer marketing on brand perceptions of consumers. It further helps marketers to understand the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase intent and consumer decision-making. Furthermore, this study adds to the body of knowledge related to the credibility of influencers from a university student perspective. In addition, this study provides information on the impact of influencer marketing on purchase decisions made during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, the study uncovers strategies to assist marketers in relation to active engagements with university students.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This is an empirical research study which used the quantitative approach to research. The target population consists of all registered students (undergraduate and postgraduate) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Westville Campus for the 2022 academic year. Non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, was used in this study owing to the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place which inhibited student access to the UKZN campuses. Questionnaires were used as a research instrument to collect primary data from participants and data collection will be carried out electronically. A link with the questionnaire and Letter of Informed Consent was sent to all registered students at the UKZN Westville Campus via the University Notices. Thereafter, the collected data was captured using the SPSS software system and analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics.

1.6 AIM AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to uncover the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour from a University of KwaZulu-Natal student perspective. The objectives are as follows:

- 1.6.1 To determine the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' perceptions of brands. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study include:
 - 1.6.1.1 To determine if influencer marketing has an effect on UKZN students' attitudes towards brands.
 - 1.6.1.2. To uncover UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality).
 - 1.6.1.3. To investigate the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour.
- 1.6.2 To ascertain the impact that influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) has on UKZN students' purchasing decisions.
- 1.6.3 To investigate the effect that influencer marketing has on the purchasing behaviour of UKZN students. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study include:
 - 1.6.3.1 To determine if brand communication content of influencers on social media influenced UKZN students' purchase decisions.
 - 1.6.3.2 To uncover the influence that electronic word of mouth through content sharing on social media has on the purchase decisions of UKZN students.
 - 1.6.3.3 To ascertain UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online brand content of influencers on purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.6.4 To formulate creative influencer marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Questions underpinning the study are listed below:

- 1.7.1 What impact does influencer marketing have on UKZN students' perceptions of brands? In this regard, the sub-questions of the study include:
 - 1.7.1.1 Does influencer marketing have an effect on UKZN students' attitudes towards brands?
 - 1.7.1.2 What are UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality)?
 - 1.7.1.3 What impact does influencer marketing have on UKZN students' decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour?
- 1.7.2 What impact does influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) have on UKZN students' purchasing decisions?
- 1.7.3 What effect does influencer marketing have on the purchasing behaviour of UKZN students? In this regard, the sub-questions of the study include:
 - 1.7.3.1 Has brand communication content of influencers on social media influenced UKZN students' purchase decisions?
 - 1.7.3.2 What influence does electronic word of mouth through content sharing on social media have on the purchase decisions of UKZN students?
 - 1.7.3.3 What are UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online brand content of influencers on purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 1.7.4 What creative influencer marketing strategies can marketers adopt for active engagement with university students?

1.8 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Hypothesis 1:

There exist significant intercorrelations amongst the key dimensions (effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity, the impact of IM on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic) of the study relating to UKZN students, respectively.

Hypothesis 2:

There is a significant difference in the perceptions of UKZN students, varying in biographical profiles (gender, age, race, educational level, and college) regarding each dimension of the study (the effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity, the impact of IM on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic), respectively.

1.9 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was confined to the Westville campus as a result of time constraints, a larger cohort of students at this campus and the researcher was also based at this location. The study was not based to a single product or service category. It was also not confined to a single social media platform, as obtaining a broader perspective for university students was the focus of the study.

1.10 SUMMARY OUTLINE PER CHAPTER

Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

Chapter One introduces the outline of the study and explains the rationale. This chapter comprises the background of the study, the focus of the study, the problem statement and the contribution of the study. Furthermore, the research objectives, research questions, hypotheses and limitations of the study are outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the literature review. Focal areas are the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of e-WOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions. This chapter also looks into the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Chapter Three presents the research methodology of the study, which comprises the research approach and design, the study site, target population, sample method and sample size. This chapter also describes the data collection method and data quality control, which is then followed by a data analysis description and a discussion of ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Results

In this chapter the emphasis is on the presentation of results which display findings and interpretations of the study. The relationships between variables and results were determined through the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The statistical analysis of the questionnaire is also presented in this chapter. The results are reported by means of graphical and tabular representations.

Chapters Five: Discussion of Results

The penultimate chapter discusses the results of the study, in line with the research questions and objectives. The results of the study are compared and contrasted against the results that other researchers' in the field have reported.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter Six, the final chapter of the study, consists of conclusions and recommendations for future research to be conducted. Furthermore, creative influencer marketing strategies are mentioned that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students.

1.11 CONCLUSION

Chapter One introduced the outline of the study and presented what it aimed to achieve. This chapter also discussed the background of the study, the focus of the study, the problem statement and the contribution of the study. In addition, the research objectives, research questions, hypotheses and limitations of the study were outlined in this chapter. The next chapter, Chapter Two, will focus on the literature review of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews some of the pertinent studies relating to the research topic that have been carried out by various researchers. The chapter outlines the findings of studies which have been carried out in the area of influencer marketing, students' attitudes towards brands, brand equity, brand switching, influencer credibility, brand communication content, students' purchase decisions, eWOM through content sharing and the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also reviews some key models for businesses to effectively use influencer marketing to enhance consumer brand perceptions and purchases.

Influencer marketing has become a tool that marketers of brands need to include in marketing strategies in order to thrive and maintain sales in an era which has vast growth in digital advertising (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). An influencer can be defined as a person who engages with a large follower base, on one or many social media platforms, known as an audience (Avhad et al., 2020). Kostic et al. (2018) also describe influencers as consumers who play an important role in the purchase intent of fellow consumers, through knowledge, views and the relationship that is shared. Companies sponsor influencers to endorse brands, products or services, as an effective marketing strategy on digital media and this collaboration is known as influencer marketing (Geysler, 2022). This chapter outlines the existing literature on influencer marketing and its impact on brand equity, influencer credibility and consumer purchase decisions.

2.2 BACKGROUND OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

According to Suciu (2020), influencer marketing originated in Britain in 1760 with the first influencer, Josiah Wedgwood, conveying marketing messages for a brand called Queensware, which was an exquisite luxury tea set, initially designed for the royal family. During this time Josiah promoted the brand through mass media (Suciu, 2020). Mass media, which is also known as traditional media, can be described as a pre-digital vehicle through which marketing messages are conveyed to mass audiences through the use of television advertisements, newspapers, magazines and banners to boost brand awareness and brand image (Belch & Belch 2015; Nhedzi, 2018).

Influencer marketing was used by companies through traditional media advertising as a successful tool during the timeframe from 1760 to 2005, even after the introduction of Web 1.0 and the internet in 1991 (Belch & Belch, 2015; Peker, 2020). Web 1.0 can be described as a platform for consumers to connect to information via the World Wide Web (internet); however, this was read-only with passive viewing of information and no two-way interaction between consumers and marketers or businesses (Sharma, 2022). Consumers were also more receptive to the messages of influencer marketers through mass media as opposed to digital media during the period from 1991 to 2003 as a result of bandwidth problems and issues experienced with internet dial-up connections (Belch & Belch, 2015; Peker, 2020).

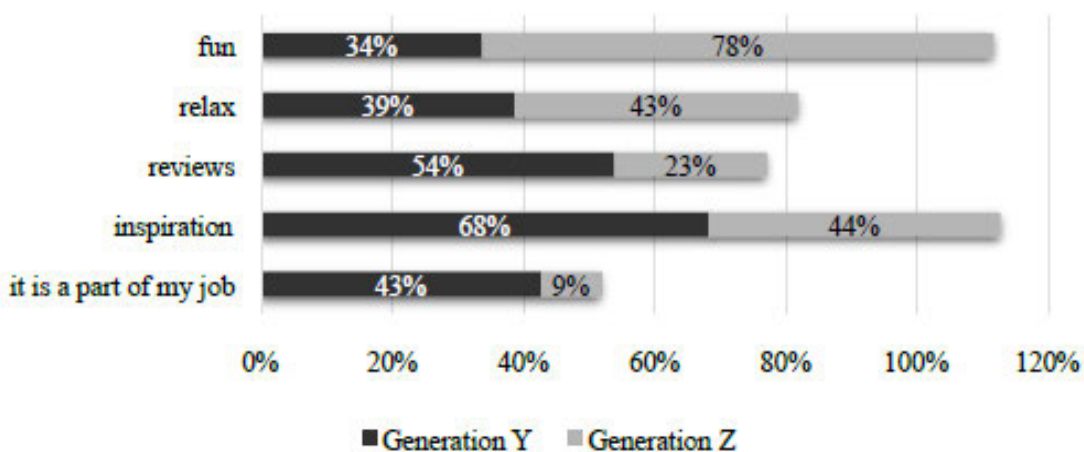
However, with the digital evolution and advancements in technology that took place in the years 2004 to 2005, there was an emergence of a drastic difference in the receptiveness and responsiveness to influencer marketing messages conveyed using digital media versus traditional media for the various generation groups (Nhedzi, 2018). In relation to influencer marketing and Generation X (born between the years 1965 and 1980), Millennials/Generation Y (born between the years 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z, also referred to as the iGeneration (born between the years 1997 and 2012), mass media began to fade with lower consumer response rates (Nhedzi, 2018). Studies reflect that during the time frame of 2004 to 2005, influencer marketing developed to become more effective on digital blogging platforms, with marketing messages and recommendations on products and services shared, for fellow consumers to view on blog sites and social media (Suciu, 2020). This was as a result of the introduction of Web 2.0 (Itliong, 2020; Nhedzi, 2018; Suciu, 2020). Web 2.0 can be defined as an advancement of Web 1.0 and is an online read/write, centralised web architecture that allowed users to customise websites, interact on social media and reach masses of fellow users to share information digitally (Itliong, 2020; Rajiv & Lal, 2010).

In 2006, rapid change came about in the use of influencer marketing, owing to the new era of micro-marketing, to consumers through social media, smartphones and artificial intelligence (AI)-based mobile applications that were introduced by Web 3.0 (Nhedzi, 2018). Itliong (2020) and Essex et al. (2023) define Web 3.0 as an online platform that unifies the world's data online or uses centralised web architecture called the semantic web. Web 3.0 facilitates advanced technical infrastructure that influencers may use to engage with and understand consumers' wants and needs. Influencers can, therefore, convey messages from consumers to businesses integrating into existing strategies and using this platform as a powerful tool to grow and ensure

success in terms of consumer loyalty to brands and increases in sales (Abuhashesh, 2014; Gan, 2023). In South Africa, the installation and availability of fibre optic cables came about in 2021, differing vastly from the infrastructure that Web 1.0 used. Consequently, this enhanced more users' (older consumers) preference for social media as opposed to mass media owing to its user-friendliness and affordability (Kukreja et al., 2023; Oki et al., 2022). Furthermore, this online platform has progressed further to Web3, which is a digital infrastructure with decentralised applications aiming to revolutionise gaming, social media industries and supply chain management (Nabben, 2023). This is achieved through the advanced connection between the real and virtual worlds via the use of AI (Hanswal et al., 2023). Influencers are able to leverage this shift and become more connected with consumers through online platforms (Gan, 2023). Through Web3 technology, influencers and brands can also interact and collaborate directly, without the need for intermediaries. Using Web3, payments are made in the form of Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) on social media sites from consumers who interact with influencers, as they engage in online gamified activities (AJ Marketing, 2024).

Figure 2.1 shows the reasons that Millennials/Generation Y and Generation Z follow influencers, with inspiration to purchase products and services being the most prevalent reason for both cohorts (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Additionally, fun is the most prevalent reason for Generation Z's following of influencers and inspiration to purchase products and services is the most prevalent reason for Generation Y's following of influencers.

Figure 2.1: Reasons for Following Influencers



Source: Kadekova and Holiencinova (2018, p.100).

The use of influencer marketing by companies has become a growing trend globally (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). This has resulted from the positive effects of influencer marketing on

younger consumers, such as boosting brand awareness, stimulating more purchases and enhancing customer loyalty (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Furthermore, influencer marketing contributes largely to the return on investment (ROI) that marketing yields in a company when compared to the other marketing tools that the company uses (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). According to Kadekova and Holiencinova (2018), the higher contribution towards the ROI is a result of increased trust in word of mouth generated by influencers rather than WOM generated by other forms of marketing tools, in 92% of consumers.

Kadekova and Holiencinova (2018) also state that in Europe there has been an increase in the collaboration between brands and influencers since 2018 as well as that companies have increased their budgets invested in influencer marketing. A study found that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in consumers spending more time on social media as many of them were working or studying from home, with 96% of consumers in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) being more interactive with influencers since the occurrence of the pandemic (Insider Intelligence, 2022).

In terms of South Africa, a study has also shown that influencer marketing is a major contributor to the constant 18% year-on-year growth of the digital marketing industry (Gavera, 2022). Pillay (2021) conducted a study based on South Africa and found that, because of increasing smartphone purchases, better telecommunication structures and improved literacy skills over the past five years, younger consumers are highly dependent on online reviews of products and services that influencers generate as this helps them with their purchase decisions. Younger consumers, or Generation Z are also a very lucrative consumer target audience as they are set to become the largest online market by 2030 from the fact that 88% of these consumers seek eWOM that influencers generate to guide their shopping choices (Pillay, 2021).

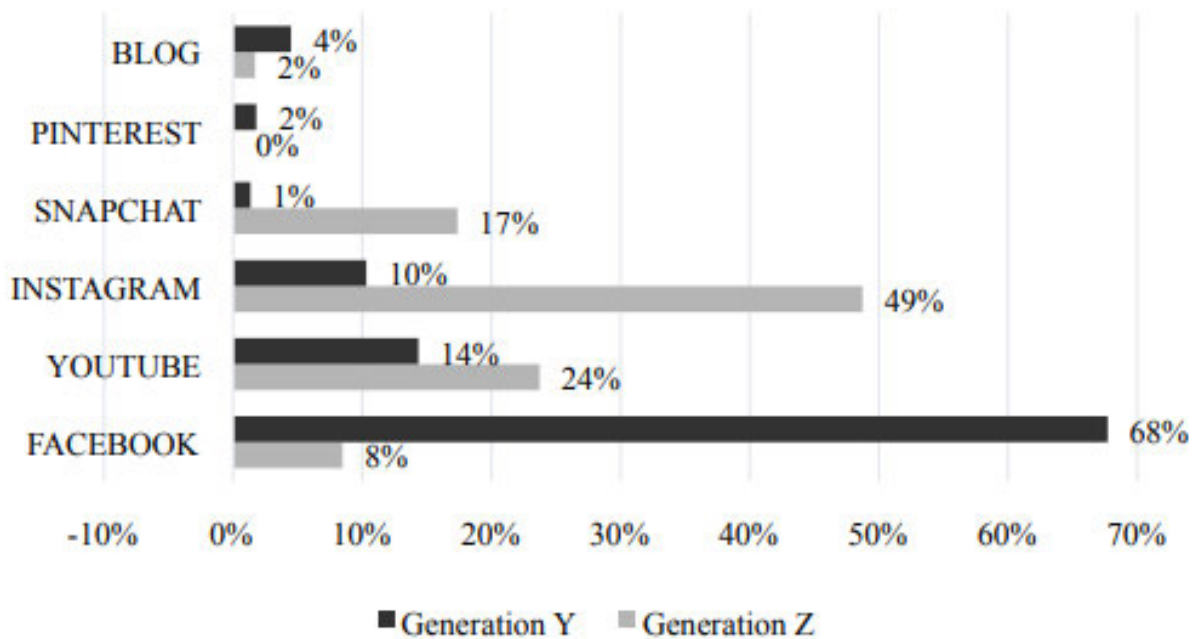
2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND PLATFORMS

Social media is constantly evolving with increasing numbers of digital platforms (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). According to Treem et al. (2016), a distinct characteristic that contrasts social media with other digital mass media platforms, such as blogging or email marketing, is that social media allows users to foster a relationship over time with other users. These relationships are facilitated through web-based technologies on social media, which allow users to interact, network and gather information (Treem et al., 2016). Subsequently, a South African based study found that users of social media are able to generate or share fellow users' eWOM and also to express their emotions by responding, favourably or unfavourably, to fellow users'

posts or statuses (Duffett & Maraule, 2024). The response is enabled through the use of comments and emoticons such as a heart, smiley/sad face or a like (Kadekova and Holiencinova, 2018).

Social media platforms also serve businesses and influencer marketers in allowing their advertisements and messages to reach a large audience or for messages to go viral, which means achieving a large number of shares by users and reaching a great audience over a short period of time (Tjárnemo et al., 2017). This creates brand awareness and also guides consumers' purchase intentions (Treem et al., 2016). There are various social media platforms and a study found that influencer marketing on social media is very cost efficient in comparison to influencer marketing on other digital or mass media platforms (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Figure 2.2 relates to influencer marketing, accordingly showing the popular social media platforms that younger consumers prefer (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018).

Figure 2.2: Preferred social media platforms of Generation Y and Z



Source: Kadekova and Holiencinova (2018, p.99).

As per Figure 2.2, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are the most popular or preferred platforms as they allow both for audio in the messages that are shared and video, which has been found to be more captivating for users or consumers as opposed to simple posts of pictures and write-ups that are predominantly present on blogs, Pinterest and Snapchat (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). These platforms can be used on both websites and by downloading an application on the user's device (smartphone, tablet, computer) (Gashi, 2017).

Furthermore, Figure 2.2 indicates that Facebook is the most preferred platform for Generation Y in comparison to the other social media platforms, with a 69% preference level (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Studies have shown that this is because Generation Y find Facebook simpler and more user-friendly than the other social media platforms (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018; Mude & Undale, 2023). Generation Y was also exposed to mass media through the evolution of marketing over time and can relate more to Facebook as it entails more reading of posts as opposed to videos and pictures that the other social media platforms prioritise (Mude & Undale, 2023). In contrast, Generation Z had a preference level of 8% for Facebook, which is vastly different from Generation Y's preference level (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Instagram was the most preferred platform for Generation Z as per Figure 2.2, with a preference level of 49%. The preference level for Instagram of Generation Z is due to its advanced software and aesthetic features, such as the built-in filters when users are taking pictures on Instagram or the ability to select video formatting when creating content, such as the boomerang feature that runs the short video on loop in a boomerang motion (Olejniczak, 2022; Yoanita, 2022). Generation Z also prefers Instagram as it allows them the opportunity for personal branding with multiple accounts being created to represent various interests (Yoanita, 2022). According to Syafrina (2024), with the lowered usage and preference of Instagram by the older generation, negative effects also arise, such as cyberbullying among Generation Z users as well as exposure to pornography with the less-stringent restrictions that Instagram has in comparison to YouTube or Facebook.

Table 2.1: Favourite Social Media Platforms to Interact with Influencers

Demographic Variables		N = 381	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	265	69.6%
	Male	116	30.4%
Age	20s	267	70.1%
	30s	98	25.7%
	40s	16	4.2%
The most-used social media platform to interact with the favorite influencer	Facebook	103	20.7%
	Twitter	29	7.6%
	Instagram	101	26.5%
	YouTube	136	36.5%
	Others	12	2.4%

Source: Jihye and Mnseong (2022).

A more recent study, based in USA. as per Table 2.1, featured YouTube, Facebook (this should be 27% instead of 20.7%) and Instagram as the most preferred platforms consumers used to interact with influencers (Jihye & Mnseong, 2022). This was a result of the higher level of

informativeness and interaction with the influencers that YouTube, Facebook and Instagram allowed for, and consequently, that these apps allowed consumers to foster relations with influencers (Jihye & Mnseong, 2022).

Furthermore, from a South African perspective, a recent study found that for younger consumers (including male and female), Generation Y's (constituting 38% of the populations internet users) favourite platforms for social media usage were Facebook (55%) and Instagram (32%) (Le Roux, 2023). These consumers preferred these platforms for the purpose of sharing pictures and experiences, networking, keeping up with trends and remaining in contact with family and friends (Le Roux, 2023). Whereas Generation Z's (constituting 26% of the populations internet users) favourite platforms for social media usage were TikTok (52%) and Instagram (40%) (Le Roux, 2023). This generation of consumers preferred these platforms as it allowed them to connect to others that displayed a sense of similarity, allowed for self-expression, was entertaining, informative and relaxing (Le Roux, 2023).

2.3.1 Instagram

Instagram is as a social media platform that was founded in 2010, which allows users to follow and interact with pages as well as other users, to post statuses and view videos on varied topics (Jayasinghe, 2020). It has excelled over the years as a business and marketing tool and has become more attractive to consumers as a result of its acquisition by Facebook, linking the two platforms (Kumar, 2019). As a result of Instagram's success, marketing professionals doubled their investment in influencer marketing in 2019 to 2380 million USD (United States dollars) (Jayasinghe, 2020). A study found a powerful tool that influencers use on Instagram to increase engagement with their audience is the hashtags that are attached to a brand phrase, for example, #Urbandecay or #Makeup (Lopez & Islam, 2021). This has been very successful as it allows Instagram users or consumers to click on the hashtag and thereafter all posts that use the same hashtag relating to the brand will come up (Lopez & Islam, 2021). According to Lopez and Islam (2021), this helps the brand and influencers to create a higher frequency of views on pages, more followers, and greater interest in the brand.

2.3.2 YouTube

YouTube is a social media platform where users, known as YouTubers, watch video content that is created by vloggers (Jayasinghe, 2020). Vloggers are an advanced version of bloggers as they have an additional dimension to their content that is not just write-ups but an engaging

video as well (Lopez & Islam, 2021). Vloggers have the potential to become famous influencers on YouTube because they interact with large audiences regarding their feelings and experiences on diverse topics (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). YouTube has provided a very lucrative social media platform for influencers (Kumar, 2019). A study conducted on influencers in relation to a beauty brand showed that 86% of the videos created on the brand by influencers based on YouTube were viewed by users as opposed to the videos that the company had created about the brand in the form of online advertisements, which attracted a 14% viewership (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Furthermore, a study conducted in Finland found that beauty companies which collaborated with influencers for video content creation over YouTube, consequently experienced exponential financial gains for the industry, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Vo, 2023). Vo (2023) further stated that consumers, more especially Generation Z, preferred companies' collaboration with influencers on YouTube as opposed to alternative advertising methods.

2.3.3 Facebook

Facebook is a similar platform to Instagram and it offers users the opportunity to create their own profiles that are a reflection of their tastes, preferences and lifestyles in their posting (Nycyk, 2020). Users of Facebook are also able to like various pages and become part of a community on that page. They are then able to interact and the posts on these pages will appear on the user's newsfeed (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Influencer marketing is widely used on Facebook in relation to reviews of products, creating awareness of brands on company Facebook pages and even customer relationship building (Vidani, 2019). A differentiating feature that Facebook has as compared to other social media platforms, is that its services are available in 70 different languages (Vidani, 2019). This diversifies the target audiences that influencers are able to reach globally (Caers et al., 2013). Of the influencers who work with brands in the US, thirty-two percent feel that Facebook is the most effective social media platform (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). From a South African perspective, Facebook supports Afrikaans, Northern Sotho, Setswana, isiXhosa, isiZulu and English (Vidani, 2019).

2.3.4 Pinterest

Pinterest is a social media platform that provides consumers with a board, which is utilised to pin and create a collection of images and articles of interest to them on this platform (Pinterest, 2024). The name Pinterest is a combination of the words pin and interest (Pinterest, 2024). This

platform inspires consumers with ideas and brilliant imagery and the platform's topics range vastly (Pinterest, 2024). Influencers on Pinterest make use of their boards to showcase their content, product and service endorsements to a wide range of audiences (Pinterest, 2024). Pinterest allows consumers to be in control of what they view; therefore, consumers enjoy this platform (Pinterest, 2024). In 2022 Pinterest received 85,500,000 global monthly visitors and previously also exceeded the online traffic of YouTube and LinkedIn (eBiz, 2023; Georgieva (2023).

2.3.5 Snapchat

Snapchat is a multimedia messaging app that was created in 2011 (Dhiman, 2022). According to Dhiman (2022), Snapchat allows for capturing videos and pictures with unique filters, as well as sharing this content with fellow users on the app or statuses. Statuses are displayed for a period of 24 hours before they disappear and are a tool used by some influencers (Dhiman, 2022). Although there are a great number of users of Snapchat, brands are sceptical of endorsing their brands here, because of the lack of transparency or evidence of success (Mann, 2024). According to Mann (2024), the number of hits, likes or views is usually visible on social media platforms but it is not visible on Snapchat, which does not allow brands to track influencer success on endorsed content. Snapchat is, consequently, used personally by influencers but is not seen too favourably by companies (Mann, 2024).

2.3.6 Twitter

Twitter, which has been renamed to X, is a popular social media platform that facilitates users' messages being broadcast in the form of tweets (AJ Marketing, 2024; Kohli et al., 2021). Tweets are limited to 280 characters (Kohli et al., 2021). This platform is therefore best used for short messages and picture posts (Kohli et al., 2021). Users of Twitter can follow other users and get updates as well as use hashtags for words to make them searchable or discoverable (Kohli et al., 2021). Twitter users are also able to reshare fellow users' tweets, which assists in messages going viral (Kohli et al., 2021). Users are also able to mention others and tag them in a post using the @ sign (Kohli et al., 2021). Collaborations on Twitter between brands and influencers entail product reviews, pre-release promotions, tweeting unique discount codes, sponsored tweets and account takeovers (Kohli et al., 2021). In 2023 Twitter's reach of influencer marketing ads had a reach of 372.9 million users (AJ Marketing, 2024).

2.3.7 TikTok

TikTok is a social media platform for content creators/influencers to generate content on any topic in short video form (Rivai, 2023). Although it is a fairly new platform, TikTok has had exponential growth since it was introduced in 2016, especially for influencers' successful interaction with younger consumers (Figliola, 2020; Jayasinghe, 2020; Rivai, 2023). TikTok is available in 155 countries globally in 39 languages with over 800 million active users, of which Millennials form the core audience (Bischoff, 2024; Figliola, 2020; Moyo, 2020). TikTok is owned by a company based in China and the term TikTok means headlines (Moyo, 2020). The TikTok app is particularly successful for influencers as it is a video recommendation app, with purely video content created by users, generating eWOM on varied topics (Figliola, 2020). The app uses artificial intelligence (AI), to track the influencers or videos that users view and, thereafter, through its recommendation engine, plays videos linked to similar brands, products and influencers whenever users log on (Jayasinghe, 2020). According to Finn (2023), there has been growth, especially in South African small and medium enterprises (SMEs) taking to TikTok. Finn (2023) states that, in relation to TikTok the South Africa's influencer growth rate is also expected to be 11.60% in 2024. There is a lack of research in relation to influencer marketing on TikTok (Dilon, 2020; Leung et al., 2022; Rivai, 2023).

2.3.8 WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a messaging social media platform, that enables users to use a form of Instant Messaging (IM), video calls, share statuses and share multimedia content (Meghrajani et al., 2023). WhatsApp works off data, and consequently, is very cost-effective for users. It was founded in 2009 and later acquired in 2014 by Facebook (Meghrajani et al., 2023). WhatsApp is used as a powerful tool for influencer marketing as it allows for one-on-one communication and more personalised messaging. WhatsApp also facilitates group chats from which content can be shared further, from these chats. Influencer statuses can be tracked by brands for the number of consumer views to track success (Meghrajani et al., 2023). Companies also track the success of influencer marketing when messages are disseminated by influencers on WhatsApp during a marketing campaign (Meghrajani et al., 2023). The online and in-store traffic is tracked as well as enquiry and sales numbers (Meghrajani et al., 2023).

2.3.9 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional social media platform that allows users to view and apply for vacancies that arise, build a network of professional acquaintances, upskill with online courses, receive or give career advice as well as view their network updates on career progress and promotions (Barney, 2023). LinkedIn is used by Human Resources (HR) departments as well, for receiving job applications, head-hunting candidates for a new role at their company, and generating content to share to market their brand, product or service (Barney, 2023). Many organisations work with influencers on LinkedIn as a representation of their professional space (Barney, 2023). It creates a good image, shares knowledge with consumers with regard to employment as well as guidelines for their purchases. LinkedIn is a growing network and platform for influencers (Barney, 2023).

2.4 ADVANTAGES OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

An effective benefit of an influencer to companies and brands is the influencer's ability to build trust and credibility with consumers, which is essential to encourage purchases and brand loyalty (Foster, 2022; Vyatkina, 2020). These two benefits are difficult to create with company-driven digital media marketing tools or display adverts because consumers are aware that these adverts are being paid for and it is not delivered by someone they trust and have been following (Foster, 2022; Vyatkina, 2020). Influencers are also beneficial to brands and companies as they each have an audience to which they deliver messages (Geysler, 2022). Companies, therefore, do not need to engage in added expenditure to find an appropriate target audience but simply select influencers that are a good fit for their brand, which entails being knowledgeable and in line with the product or service category (Geysler 2022, Vyatkina, 2020).

Globally, influencer marketing also serves as a vehicle that is more effective in reaching target audiences through the use of online platforms in comparison to other online advertising tools such as banner ads, click-stream pattern advertising or search engine optimisation (SEO) (de Haan, 2023; Vyatkina, 2020). This is a result of the 30% year-on-year growth of online ad-blocking software, owing to the rise in consumers' use of the software (de Haan, 2023). According to Vyatkina (2020), ad-blocking software allows consumers to set restrictions on its settings to prohibit market-generated adverts (MGA) from appearing on their newsfeeds on social media. Marketers are, therefore, seeking new ways to connect with consumers in advertising online, which influencers provide through user-generated content (UGC) (Vyatkina, 2020). User-generated content can be described as content on social media that is

created by fellow customers of a brand delivered to their peers and which is ultimately considered credible and content trusted (Goldenberg et al., 2024).

From a South African perspective, younger consumers are the predominant users of social media and, as a benefit, influencers generate a high level of brand love and argument quality in these consumers (Pillay, 2021). Brand love can be defined as an emotional bond that a satisfied customer forms with a brand, as a result of a positive experience and therefore positive association with the brand (Kang, 2015). Influencers create brand love through their long-term relationship building with consumers and the evaluations they share through eWOM (You et al., 2020). Argument quality is the level to which consumers feel that information is persuasive and valuable (Xu & Yao, 2015). eWOM generated by influencers has shown a high level of argument quality for young consumers, in South Africa and, therefore, influences consumers' purchase decisions (Pillay, 2021).

2.5 DEMERITS OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

According to Diza (2017), influencer marketing has proven to be one of the most successful marketing tools. In addition, there is a lack of academic studies that have found an unsuccessful influencer marketing campaign. However, there are some disadvantages or demerits that businesses need to be aware of in relation to influencer marketing to ensure the abovementioned success (Diza, 2017). The use of influencer marketing is highly reliant on the influencer and their traits or actions could have potentially negative effects on the brand (Diza, 2017). According to Belch and Belch (2015), the influencer could overshadow the brand if they are very well known and have an extensive follower base. This causes brand messages and advertising to be ignored as the consumers are focused more on the influencer (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). The brand for a children's charity, St. Johns, collaborated with Angelina Jolie as a celebrity influencer and subsequently found that her celebrity status overshadowed the brand and its campaign, subsequently causing harm to the brand in lack of exposure, owing to misdirected focus of consumers (Belch & Belch, 2015).

According to Diza (2017), partial control of the brand that a company hands over to the influencer to represent and deliver its messages could be a disadvantage if the influencer is not well acquainted with the product or service and the brand or marketing objectives of the campaign. This hinders the success of a marketing campaign and also brings about difficulty in the measurement of the influencer marketing campaign's effectiveness (Diza, 2017). Furthermore, Belch and Belch (2015) state that receptivity of a target audience could be

impacted negatively owing to overexposure of the influencer and lack of receptivity from an influencer's audience in relation to the brand. Overexposure is a concept which occurs when an influencer is affiliated with numerous brands. This impacts brands negatively as consumers become sceptical of products and services, questioning the influencer's motive of getting paid more for celebrity endorsements versus conveying credible brand messages (Belch & Belch, 2015). From a South African young consumer perspective, a study has shown that a lack of receptivity for eWOM in relation to brand messages is present in these consumers when focus is placed highly on the credibility of the influencer, as opposed to complete and comprehensive messages that the influencer shares (Moloi et al., 2022). Generation Z value messages that are relatable and easier to understand and it is therefore important for marketers to collaborate with influencers that appeal to the target audience rather than face this challenge or disadvantage in the marketing campaign (Pillay, 2021).

2.6 THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BRANDS

This section of the discussion is based on consumer perceptions of brands in relation to influencer marketing. Consumer perceptions can be described as the process by which consumers select, organise and interpret information in relation to a stimulus (Madichie & Rameek, 2012). A stimulus can be defined as anything that draws the attention of a person, and thereafter, causes a reaction (Madichie & Rameek, 2012). In this study, influencer marketing can be categorised as a stimulus; therefore, this is an important area to explore. This section will focus on the effect of influencer marketing on consumer attitudes towards brands and its effectiveness in creating brand equity.

2.6.1 The effect of influencer marketing on consumer attitudes towards brands

Keller (2013) describes brand attitudes as the reason why consumers choose a particular brand since it entails an overall assessment of a brand by consumers. A brand attitude also "depends on specific attributes and benefits of the brand" (Keller, 2013, p.89). A study based on younger consumers in India found that using an expert on the product or service as an influencer has a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards brands (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). This positive effect on consumer attitudes builds brand admiration and eventually leads to the influencer's ability to influence the consumer's purchase decisions (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Brand admiration occurs when consumers express feelings of love, trust and respect towards a brand (Park et al., 2016). Furthermore, a study conducted in Europe found that influencers are very

impactful on consumer brand attitudes through the eWOM that they generate on social media (Bakker, 2018). The study suggested that it would be beneficial to use influencers as part of brand communication since the positive effect on brand attitudes led to higher consumer purchases by Millennials that make up the majority of e-commerce consumers in digital marketing globally (Bakker, 2018). Brand attitudes were also impacted positively by influencers who had attractive personalities and were likeable (Bakker, 2018). According to Trivedi and Sama (2020), and Joshi et al. (2023), there is a lack of research relating to the impact of influencer marketing on consumer attitudes for younger consumers, specifically Generation Z. There is also a lack of research in this area based on South African consumers. This study, therefore, aims to explore the impact of influencer marketing on consumer attitudes towards brands from a South African student perspective.

2.6.2 The effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity

Kotler and Keller (2015) describe the process of branding as attaching the power of a brand to a product, service, place or person with the objective of influencing consumers' perceptions of brands. When products and services are branded, it is important for marketers to build brand value according to the perceptions of consumers, which is also referred to as brand equity (Renchen, 2020). The constituents of brand equity are brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, and perceived brand quality.

2.6.2.1 Brand awareness

Brand awareness can be described as a consumer's ability to recognise a brand that is associated with a product or service category (Latif et al., 2014). A study by Renchen (2020) showed that brands gain strength by developing brand awareness through communication between consumers and the provider of products and services, through which the influencer is a powerful tool. Furthermore, factors that were found to boost brand awareness were the correct fit of influencer for the target segment, as well as the use of a real-life character as an influencer who displays authenticity as opposed to a person artificially playing the role as a marketing strategy (Renchen, 2020). A study based in Europe found that consumers develop a sense of trust in influencers on social media through their followership, which results in enhancing their knowledge of brands that are paired with the influencers, and subsequently increases brand awareness (Jovanovska & Bogoevska-Gavrilova, 2021). Jovanovska and Bogoevska-Gavrilova (2021) also state that influencers impact consumers' buying decision process

positively as it improves the consumers' ability to recognise a branded product and its benefits, as opposed to other brands in the same product category. This endorsement by influencers creates a sense of confidence in consumers and has a positive effect on purchases (Jovanovska & Bogoevska-Gavrilova, 2021).

Kleintjes (2017) found that 41% of the South African consumers on Instagram are between the ages of 16 and 24. Furthermore, a recent study, that reflects growth over time in South Africa, focused on percentiles of age groups of Instagram users, found that consumers in the age group of 18 to 24 years represented the highest percentile, which was 30.2% (Cowling, 2023). Mr Price (MRP), a South African brand with many retail stores across the country that offers clothing, shoes, jewellery and accessories to consumers, regularly collaborates with local influencer, Niquita Bento, who has over 14 000 followers as part of her social capital (Kleintjes, 2017). According to Kleintjes (2017), Niquita was requested by MRP to put together daily outfits that could be worn by consumers and to post pictures of these combinations of outfits on her Instagram page. MRP found that it was definitely more effective to create brand awareness by collaborating with an influencer who has an audience on social media, as opposed to a random clothing model with whom consumers do not interact (Kleintjes, 2017). As part of this collaboration, MRP encouraged consumers to buy the clothing that Niquita was wearing, take pictures of themselves wearing the apparel and then post it onto their social media pages, to create brand awareness by sharing it with their social capital (Kleintjes, 2017). In doing so, MRP encouraged user-generated and eWOM to be created and circulated in the representation of the brand which is effectively engaged in influencer marketing (Kleintjes, 2017). Niquita received over 3000 likes and more than 40 comments for her MRP post on Instagram (Kleintjes, 2017). According to Kleintjes (2017), the pictures and success of this collaboration were also shared on Elle magazine's website. Instagram and Elle magazine's posts, with the use of influencer marketing, exposed MRP to new audiences, follower networks, and created brand awareness very effectively (Kleintjes, 2017).

2.6.2.2 Brand image

Brand image can be described as creating a node in relation to the brand in a consumer's memory (Keller, 2013). It can further be defined as the consumer's perceptions of a brand and that which comes to mind in terms of consumer experience or satisfaction derived in association with a particular brand's consumption (Keller, 2013). Keller (2013) further states

that the aim of creating a brand image is to distinguish a brand and to prevent consumers from associating all brands together that are in the same category.

A study by Hermanda et al. (2019) in Indonesia stated that company budgets for influencer marketing had increased by from 20% to 30% since previous years because of the crucial role it plays in creating an effective brand image and the subsequent benefits thereof. This study was based on cosmetics products and found that there was a positive relationship between brand image and consumer purchases (Hermanda et al., 2019). As a result, influencers were able to generate positive reviews and eWOM successfully to create a good brand image for the cosmetics products, which increased sales for businesses and also broadened the reach of the brand, thereby allowing it to compete with imported cosmetics brands (Hermanda et al., 2019). This study found that the significant relationship between influencer marketing and brand image plays an important role in the success of businesses (Hermanda et al., 2019).

Furthermore, according to Kleintjes (2017), a study that was undertaken in South Africa, showed that influencer marketing on Instagram contributes to the production and consumption of information in new ways. This study also stated that, through influencer marketing, consumers' sharing opinions of brands (UGC) plays a significant role in promoting brand image and creating brand value (Kleintjes, 2017). A lack of studies exist that explore the effect of influencer marketing on brand image from a younger consumer or Generation Z perspective. It is, therefore, interesting to research this from the perspective of a university student to contribute to the body of knowledge.

2.6.2.3 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty can be defined as consumers' willingness to buy a particular brand regularly, with very little or no consideration of switching to an alternative brand (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) further state that brand loyalty is developed by a high level of consumer satisfaction resulting in repeat purchases and patronage by customers towards a brand. A study in Sweden showed that influencer marketing enhances brand loyalty when consumer expectations of brands are met upon consumption (Grafström et al., 2018). Furthermore, a study undertaken in the Republic of Macedonia found that influencer marketing is a key driver of brand loyalty since it creates brand awareness and allows consumers to identify brands and to develop preferences accordingly (Jovanovska & Bogoevska-Gavrilova, 2021). Although many studies describe social media's enhancement of brand loyalty in

consumers, there is, however, limited research that describes the impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty (Abasin & Huseynov, 2020; Ekstam & Rjurling, 2018; Trivedi & Sama, 2020; Zhung, 2017; Ziewiecki & Ross, 2022). This study aims to fill the gap in extant literature in relation to younger consumers or Generation Z from a South African perspective.

2.6.2.4 Perceived brand quality

According to Keller (2013), perceived brand quality can be described as consumers' perceptions of a brand's quality or its superiority compared to alternative brands in the same category. Some of the factors that consumers take into consideration in relation to perceived brand quality are product speed, accuracy, care for the product, or helpfulness of customer service (Keller, 2013). Influencer marketing plays a major role in perceived brand quality, as consumers seek information with regard to quality from influencers and the messages that they convey (Liu, 2021). Consumers regard influencer messages as credible in terms of a brand's quality and also feel that, in doing so, they are reducing the risk as well as information costs in their purchase decision. Marketers of brands, therefore, actively request influencers to spread brand messages on brand quality, while maintaining authenticity and credibility (Liu, 2021).

Sánchez et al. (2021) also state that influencer marketing is more effective when collaborating with renowned brands as opposed to non-renowned brands in creating perceived brand quality for consumers. Renowned brands can be described as brands that are well known and are, therefore, regarded as household names (Samson, 2021). These brands have a good reputation and maintain high quality. According to Samson (2021), some renowned brands in South Africa are MTN, Vodacom, FNB, Multichoice and Woolworths. Furthermore, Sánchez et al. (2021) state that creating perceived brand quality by influencer marketers in relation to renowned brands also enhances brand associations and purchase intentions of consumers. From a South African perspective, Mumbengegwi (2019), states that influencer marketing is an important communication tool to impact perceived brand quality positively for consumers. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies in this area of research on influencers and perceived brand quality (Sánchez et al., 2021). It will, therefore, be interesting to explore this area further in this study from a younger South African consumer perspective.

2.6.3 The impact of influencer marketing on consumer decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour

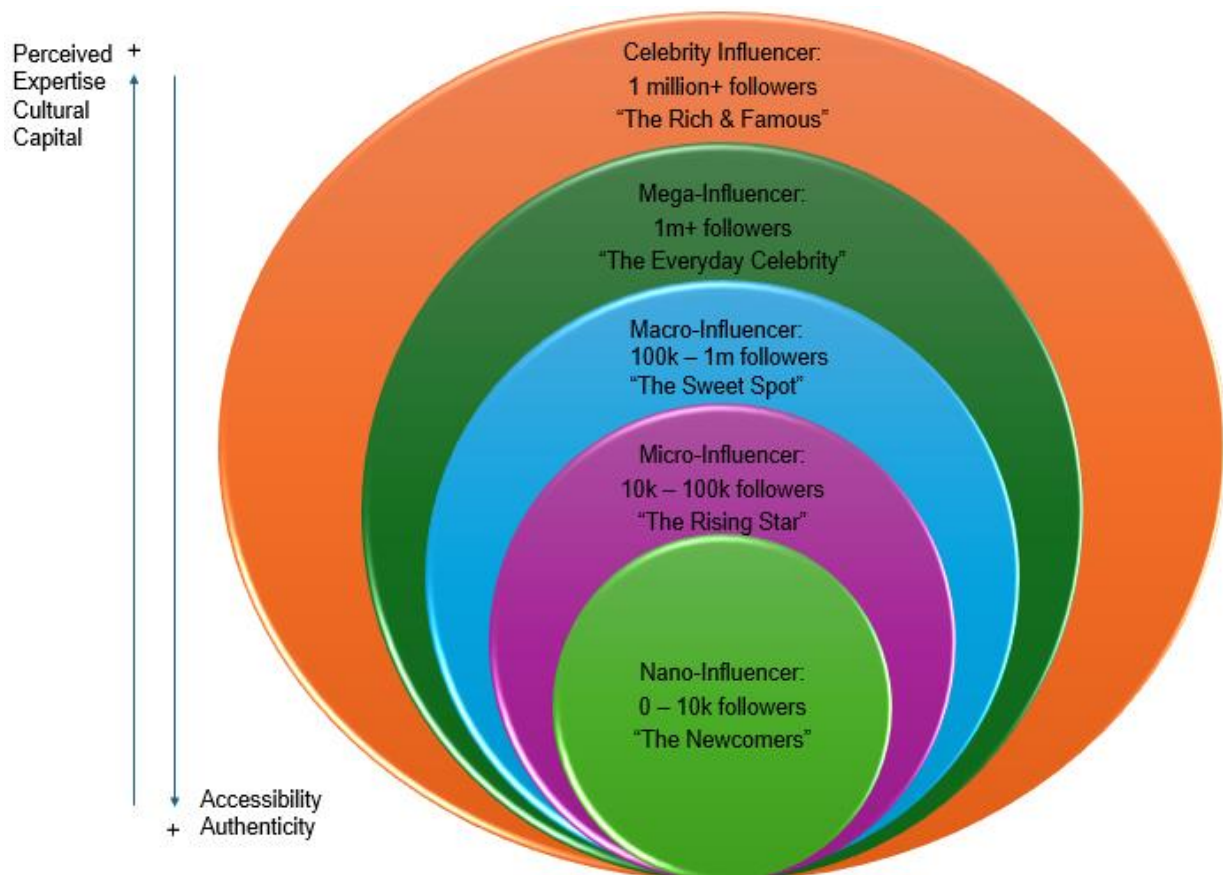
Brand switching can be described as the opposite of brand loyalty, where a consumer chooses to purchase an alternative brand of products or services as opposed to their routine brand of choice (Gulamali & Persson, 2017). This is also known as brand jumping and the three factors that commonly cause this to occur are price, quality and availability (Tatum, 2022). A study found that the most effective variables causing brand switching among consumers in relation to influencer traits associated with brands were clarity in messages conveyed on the product as well as experience and expertise regarding the product (Gulamali & Persson, 2017).

Studies also found that a higher percentage of brand switching occurred on a global scale when consumers were exposed to influencers' posts with visual content that social media enables, as opposed to influencer content with only verbal or written content on traditional media or blogs which do not trigger as much interest or brand switching from consumers (Gulamali & Persson, 2017; Haenlein et al., 2020). A study based on South African consumers found that brand associations which influencers bring about through eWOM and their marketing messages, impact the perceptions that consumers have of brands, and subsequently result in brand-switching behaviour by consumers (Mumbengegwi, 2019). Brand associations can be described as the process by which consumers form a connection between a brand and an entity, associating things like judgements and even feelings between the two (Keller, 2013). Furthermore, Mumbengegwi (2019) states that, if influencers create positive brand associations, consumers will remain loyal to the brand. However, if influencers were to create negative brand associations, consumers who follow these influencers would consequently choose other alternatives of which influencers create better perceptions, and switch to that brand since consumers believe it would bring about more satisfaction and fulfilment (Leung et al., 2022).

2.7 TYPES OF INFLUENCERS

A study by Diza (2017) reflected that there are different categories of influencers, further assisting marketers to find an effective influencer who is a good fit for their brand as part of their business strategy (Diza, 2017). The different categories of influencers include nano-, micro-, macro-, mega- and celebrity influencers (Figure 2.4) (Jayasinghe, 2020). These categories differ in terms of the number of followers that each type of influencer possesses on social media (Vyatkina, 2020).

Figure 2.4: Types of Influencers



Source: Jayasinghe (2020).

2.7.1 Nano-influencer

According to Jayasinghe (2020), a nano-influencer is a person who has fewer than 10 000 followers. This type of influencer would be very effective and regarded as most credible for a target audience of a particular neighbourhood or special community (Vyatkina, 2020). Vyatkina (2020) also states that the marketing messages of nano-influencers seem like friendly advice and are well received; however, these influencers lack reach compared to the other types of influencers.

2.7.2 Micro-influencer

Diza (2017) states that micro-influencers are also everyday consumers who have a small niche of consumers for whom they create content and with whom they interact personally. Micro-influencers have a greater follower base than nano-influencers, ranging from 10 000 to 100 000 followers (Jayasinghe, 2020). Micro-influencers are also known as social influencers (Diza, 2017).

2.7.3 Macro-influencer

In addition, macro-influencers differ from micro-influencers since the former post content on a much larger scale, having a larger number of followers (100 000 to 1 000 000), most of whom can be considered to be strangers to the influencer (Diza, 2017; Jayasinghe, 2020). Macro-influencers effectively serve marketers with certain types of target audiences, as a result of developed experience, expertise (quality-generated content), openness, and professionalism (Vyatkina, 2020). Influencers who fall under this category are known as the sweet spot for marketers because these influencers produce good ROI owing to having a balance between interactivity with consumers and reach (Diza, 2017).

2.7.4 Mega-influencer

Mega-influencers are larger than nano, micro and macro-influencers/opinion leaders as their influence is on a global scale (Diza, 2017). These are influencers who have grown on social media over time to celebrity status (Vyatkina, 2020). According to Jayasinghe (2020), mega-influencers are professional and treat their influencer career as their primary source of income. They have a million followers or more and also make use of managers to organise their social media feeds (Vyatkina, 2020). Mega-influencers are less specialised and are endorsed to represent a wide range of products and services (Diza, 2017). However, mega-influencers are seen by some audiences as less authentic than the smaller influencers and also lack engagement with consumers on a personal level (Diza, 2017).

2.7.5 Celebrity influencer

Celebrity influencers are influencers on social media as a result of their fame and a career that has made them well known among consumers who take great interest in them (Vyatkina, 2020). Celebrity influencers include actors, athletes, artists and even celebrity socialites who have enormous reach (one million followers or more) (Vyatkina, 2020). However, despite celebrity

influencers being able to create brand awareness quite effectively, they lack the ability that nano-, macro- and micro-influencers have in driving a desired action from consumers due to the lack of personal interaction with consumers (Diza, 2017). Figure 2.4 displays the types of influencers and depicts their perceived expertise and cultural capital (social media following) versus their authenticity (credibility) and accessibility, according to consumer views (Jayasinghe, 2020). Figure 2.4 shows that the higher the number of followers that influencers have, the lower the authenticity or credibility the influencer has, according to consumer perceptions (Jayasinghe, 2020).

According to Belch and Belch (2015), credibility can be described as the extent to which consumers see the source (person communicating a marketing message) or influencer as having the appropriate knowledge, skills and expertise, as well as trusting the influencer to give an unbiased and objective opinion on the products or the brand. Furthermore, with regard to the source credibility theory, Belch and Belch (2015) state that when a consumer adopts the opinion of an influencer, as believed to be accurate, then internalisation occurs. This can be described as a process by which the consumer takes on or adopts the opinions, beliefs, behaviour and attitudes that the influencer has displayed in marketing messages and these tend to be maintained towards the brand even after the influencer is forgotten (Armstrong & Kotler, 2018; Belch & Belch, 2015).

It is also important for marketers to understand the level of credibility needed versus consumer views or position on a brand's products or services (Kakkar, 2022). A highly credible influencer would be very beneficial when conveying marketing messages to consumers who have a negative perception of a brand, whereas the same would not be as effective for consumers who have a neutral or positive view of the brand (Holiday et al., 2023). This study explores the dimensions of influencers' credibility, namely influencer attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise/skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise.

2.8 INFLUENCER CREDIBILITY

There are various factors that pertain to the credibility (as well as Kelman's Source Attribute Model) of an influencer, namely, attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise/skills, homophily/similarity, popularity, product expertise and the impact of influencer credibility on purchasing decisions (Belch & Belch, 2015). Some of the contributing elements within these factors, are knowledge, skills, and power (Belch & Belch, 2015). This will be discussed in detail in the subsequent subsections.

2.8.1 Attractiveness

Attractiveness can be described as the admiration that a consumer has for an influencer in terms of their attributes, such as their physical appearance, personality type or even their talent (Belch & Belch, 2015). Attractiveness, for the influencer, is developed through the process of identification by the consumer, where the consumer is motivated to form some sort of connection to the influencer, and therefore acquires or identifies with the beliefs, attitudes, preferences and behaviour of the influencer (Thomson & Strickland, 2018). Studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between influencer attractiveness and consumer purchase intent, as it creates a positive attitude towards the brand and helps with consumer receptivity to advertising messages on social media (Aniruddha & Ramanjaneyalu, 2022; Dixon et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2022).

A study based on South African consumers found that the attractiveness of influencers plays a major role in the impact that influencers have on consumers, according to the source attractiveness theory (Nyamande, 2020). According to Seiler and Kucza (2017), the source attractiveness theory states that influencers develop credibility through their attractiveness to consumers. This enhances the effectiveness of the influencer's endorsements, as it creates a sense of fondness and likeability towards the influencer and their marketing messages (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). According to Nyamande (2020), the study found that there is a positive correlation between influencer attractiveness, consumer attitude and purchase intention for younger consumers. Studies also found that influencers with attractive features have more of an advantage in capturing the attention of followers easily, influencing the acceptance level of eWOM, and thereby giving rise to positive consumer attitudes and purchase decisions (Nyamande, 2020; Lim et al., 2017).

2.8.2 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be described as influencers being regarded as honest and their marketing messages being more believable for consumers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2018; Belch & Belch, 2015). Marketers tend to find it difficult to find trustworthy influencers to endorse their brands as these influencers are apprehensive about being associated with the new brands and are concerned about the potentially negative impact that it may have on their reputation or image (Khan et al., 2022).

Influencers also need to be mindful that many different factors could impact their trustworthiness negatively, such as an endorsement of brands predominantly for personal gain and self-interest (Negm & El Halawany, 2020). This is a major concern for consumers and it causes influencers to lose their trustworthiness (Negm & El Halawany, 2020). To protect consumers, the Federal Trade Commission passed guidelines in 2009, stipulating that influencers need to disclose content that they create for social media concerning any brands or companies with which they are associated (Belch & Belch, 2015). However, a study showed that 30% of related brand content being posted on social media by sources or influencers is fake and scripted (Belch & Belch, 2015). Despite the negative aspects and how cautious influencers need to be concerning trustworthiness, once achieved, the positive impact that it has is far stronger than potential negatives (Santora, 2022). In addition, on a global scale, studies state that trustworthiness should be a sought after virtue by all influencers because of its impactful contribution to credibility (Khairunnisa & Riyanto, 2020; Negm & El Halawany, 2020; Santora, 2022; Umeogu, 2012).

From a South African perspective, a study based on younger consumers found that these consumers associate trust more with the average influencer (nano/micro/macro/mega) on social media as opposed to celebrity influencers (Nyamande, 2020). According to Nyamande (2020), this sense of trust enhances the influencer's ability to ensure that customers remain loyal to a brand. Subsequently, brand loyalty builds brand equity and ultimately improves ROI for companies. In addition, Millennials have also been found to imitate influencers whom they find trustworthy in terms of brand of choice and purchase intentions (Nyamande, 2020).

2.8.3 Expertise/skills

Expertise refers to an influencer's knowledge, skills and experience relating to a communication topic or brand (Belch & Belch, 2015). An influencer's level of expertise is based on the level of competency that the influencer possesses in relation to a brand, which ultimately determines credibility (Kakkar, 2022). If an influencer is a novice and not well acquainted with the use of products or the consumption of services, this would reflect poorly on consumers' perceptions of the influencer's level of expertise (Belch & Belch, 2015). Hannu and Johannisson (2020) further state that low to no expertise regarding a brand will lead to a negative purchase intent in consumers and that a high level of expertise will result in a positive purchase intention in consumers through successful marketing campaigns. A study conducted

in Greece found that a macro celebrity or opinion leader has a larger following owing to their higher level of expertise and serves brands well in this area (Diza, 2017).

From a young South African consumer's perspective, influencer expertise was not regarded as one of the most significant contributors to influencer credibility and usefulness of information for eWOM, compared to the other dimensions of credibility (Pillay, 2021). Influencer expertise also lacked importance for younger consumer purchase decisions (Ezenwafor et al., 2021; Molelekeng & Dondolo, 2021). It is interesting to explore this aspect further in this study from a younger consumer's perspective.

2.8.4 Homophily/similarity

Homophily can be described as one's tendency to associate with others who have similarities to them and forms a central pattern of human relationships (Bu et al., 2022). Homophily provides meaning to those who are in the relationship and impacts their social interaction, and is also referred to as similarity (Lawrence & Shah, 2017). Belch and Belch (2015) further state that consumers are more likely to be influenced by people with whom they have similarities, such as similar needs, interests, goals and lifestyles. Marketing messages and campaigns are received better when this sort of similarity exists (Belch & Belch, 2015; Oriedi et al., 2021).

Similarity is also used to evoke emotions in consumers and appeals to consumers' sense of empathy towards the influencer (Arora, 2021). Globally, when looking at the content created, consumers see themselves because of similar traits in the influencer's situation and these consumers develop a need for the same product or service that the influencer is consuming (Oriedi et al., 2021). This emotional bond created through similarity also increases persuasiveness for the influencer (Belch & Belch, 2015; Bu et al., 2022). Belch and Belch (2015) state further that regular, average people are better suited for the trait of similarity as an influencer as opposed to celebrities because consumers relate better to average people in this area.

According to Kleintjes (2017), MRP uses influencers whom younger consumers consider similar to themselves and are relatable because consumers find their traits familiar to their own. This is done because it causes younger consumers to relate better to the brand messages that these influencers generate and post, also causing consumers to engage more and to become loyal customers of the brand (Kleintjes, 2017). Furthermore, influencers who possess traits of homophily for younger consumers help the brand messages and advertising to stand out in the

minds of these consumers, since they feel that they have an understanding of the brand and this promotes a connection with the brand (Kleintjes, 2017).

2.8.5 Popularity

Popularity can be defined as a social phenomenon linked with being sought after, admired, well known and accepted (Arora, 2022; Gisbey, 2016). When related to endorsers and influencers, popularity can also be referred to as a person's likeability, and when this trait is possessed, it adds value to the brand to which influencers are linked (Belch & Belch, 2015). According to Khan et al., (2022), marketers are willing to spend large budgets globally on popular influencers, and popularity enhances an influencer's stopping power. Stopping power can be defined as a person who can draw attention to a brand's product or services in a very cluttered environment (celebrities and mega-influencers) (Belch & Belch, 2015; Khan et al., 2022). Influencer popularity favourably influences consumers' feelings, purchase behaviour and brand attitudes (Arora, 2022).

A study in South Africa found that the popularity of an influencer is measured by the number of followers they have on social media (Roux, 2020). Subsequently, a greater level of influencer popularity serves marketers and brand advertising messages as it increases the potential for going viral (Roux, 2020). Brands, therefore, tend to collaborate with influencers who have a larger number of followers (Kleintjes, 2017). This is successful for certain marketing strategies; however, strategically it would serve brands rather to align this collaboration with the company's business goals instead of with popularity and large follower numbers as a constant priority (Roux, 2020). A lack of studies exist based on younger consumers in this area and it is, therefore, interesting to explore this from the perspective of a South African university student.

2.8.6 Product expertise

An influencer's product expertise refers to having a person advertise or endorse a product of which they have first-hand usage experience (von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021). Siemens et al. (2008) state that when an influencer has product expertise, it is said that product congruency exists, which enhances credibility, brand attitudes and consumers' purchase intentions. Furthermore, the effects of product congruency are impacted by how well known an influencer is (Belanche et al., 2019; Siemens et al., 2008). Subsequently, studies have shown that if product incongruency exists for an influencer, consumers would then respond better to

that influencer if they were not well known, compared to being well known (Belanche et al., 2019; Siemens et al., 2008).

In addition, a study shows that product congruency enhances consumer attitudes towards brands and product incongruency has the opposite effect (Siemens et al., 2008). This study presented an example of Jeff Gordon who possesses product expertise (congruency) in the race car field and endorses tyres for the Goodyear brand (Siemens et al., 2008). According to Siemens et al. (2008), Jeff Gordon attempted to diversify and grow his follower base by endorsing Snow Skis. This had a negative response and even altered consumers' perception of the influencer in terms of credibility as a result of endorsing a product about which he does not have experience or expertise (Siemens et al., 2008). There is a gap in the literature available with regard to influencer product expertise, both globally and in South Africa (Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2022; Ríha & Řihová, 2018; Vaidya & Karnawat, 2023).

2.8.7 The impact of influencer credibility on purchasing decisions

According to Özbölük and Akdoğan (2022), a study conducted in Turkey was based on influencer credibility across varied product categories and stated that influencer credibility does tend to vary in the effect that it has on consumers' purchase decisions according to different product categories. The credibility dimension of influencer popularity did not impact consumer purchases positively, whereas the other credibility dimensions of influencer similarity, attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness increased influencer credibility and had a significantly positive impact on consumer purchases (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022). Furthermore, mega-influencers (online celebrities) had a higher level of credibility than celebrity influencers (traditional celebrities), and therefore had a greater impact on consumers' purchase intentions (Kiss, 2021). Credibility of influencers, as a result of their attractiveness, impacted consumer purchases more for the beauty and fashion industry as opposed to other industries or brands of other product categories (Kiss, 2021; Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022). Özbölük and Akdoğan (2022) also state that there is a lack of empirical research based on the impact of influencer credibility on consumer purchases.

A study in Finland, based on the impact of influencer credibility on consumer purchases of sustainable products, found that when much emphasis was placed on the credibility dimension, an influencer's appearance or attractiveness in the UGC (video and verbal message), had a negative impact on consumer purchases (Kiss, 2021). Sustainable products can be defined as

products that conserve resources, do not cause pollution and harm and are beneficial to stakeholders as well as to the economy and society (Ahmad et al., 2018). According to Kiss (2021), credibility had more impact on consumer purchases when greater emphasis was placed on the dimensions of trustworthiness and similarity. This was because consumers felt that the message regarding the products was authentic and reduced the risk in making the purchase. Consumers felt that they could relate to the influencer and likewise to the influencer's purchase decisions (Kiss, 2021).

Furthermore, a study based on younger consumers in South Africa, in relation to influencer Selina Naidoo's endorsement of cleaners, such as the brand Handy Andy, found that the dimensions of credibility that had a most significant positive impact on consumer purchases were trustworthiness, similarity (homophily) and product expertise (Moodley, 2021). According to Moodley (2021), consumers started to purchase more of the product because they accept Naidoo's messages or UGC as authentic and reliable. Consumers are able to relate to Naidoo and her choices of brands for purchase (Moodley, 2021). Furthermore, Naidoo displayed her personal use of the product in her home as part of her UGC, showing its effectiveness (Moodley, 2021). These factors enhanced her credibility and resulted in an increase in consumer purchases (Moodley, 2021).

2.9 THE EFFECT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR

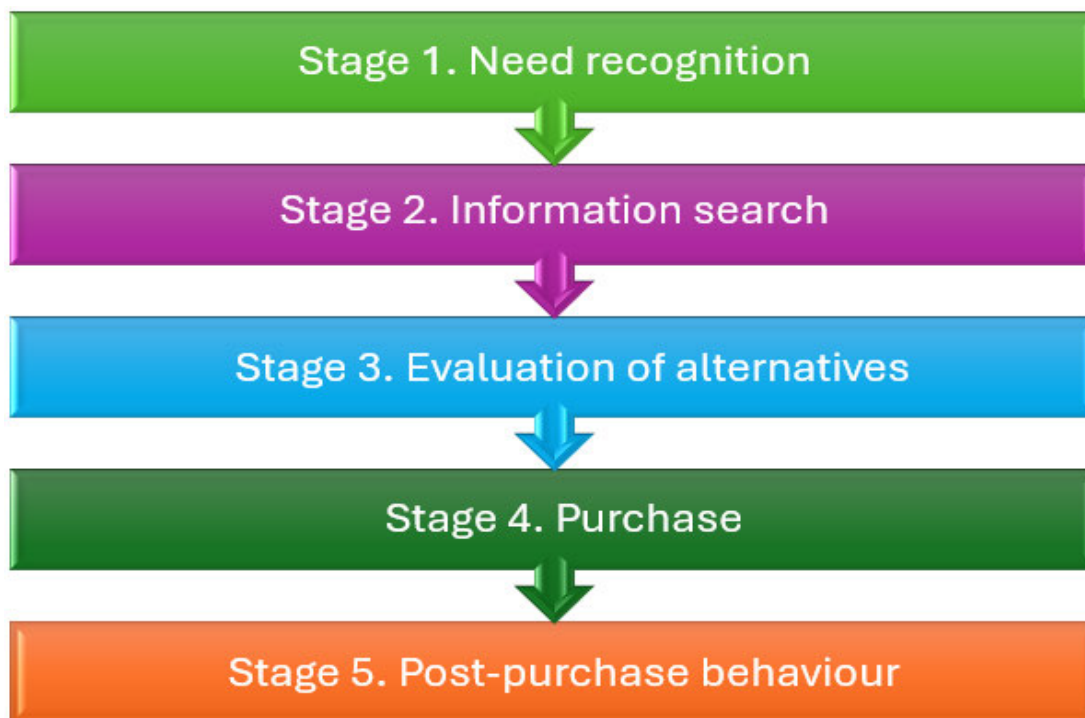
According to Žák and Hasprová (2020), influencer marketing currently plays a pivotal role in influencing consumer purchase decisions. Traditional marketing is regarded as monotonous and influencers are far more effective in this area owing to their unique skills, specific knowledge, and their personalities. Influencers are also able to impact consumer decisions on purchases either directly or indirectly (Žák & Hasprová, 2020).

Nurfdila (2020) further describes influencer marketing as the most powerful tool in the marketplace with regard to impacting consumer decisions or purchase intentions. Influencer marketing was found to be more effective for the product categories of clothes, shoes and services (Nurfdila, 2020). However, it was less effective when there were other factors that had a greater impact on the product categories of food, jewellery and electronics (Žák & Hasprová, 2020).

2.9.1 Consumer Decision-making Process

The consumer decision-making process is sequential and contains five steps through which a consumer proceeds when making a purchase decision (McDaniel et al., 2013). These stages include need recognition, pre-purchase search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation (Stankevich, 2017). Figure 2.5: the consumer decision-making process, displays these steps and the factors that influence them (McDaniel et al., 2013).

Figure 2.5: Consumer Decision-Making Process



Source: McDaniel et al. (2013).

Stage 1: Need recognition: This is where the consumer is challenged with a problem that creates a need to begin the decision-making process for a new product or service (Schiffman et al., 2015). There are two types of triggers for need recognition in consumers that occur according to the type of consumers that they are (Schiffman et al., 2015). First, there are actual state types where there is a defect in the consumer's old product and they, subsequently, require a new one (Schiffman et al., 2015). Second, being desired state types, where consumers just desire having something new and this drives their need recognition for the new product or service (Schiffman et al., 2015).

A study conducted in India found that influencers impact both of these types of consumer by triggering the consumers' need recognition (Negi & Pabalkar, 2020). First, with online reviews

of technology products, for example, the latest features and improvements in Apple's new iPhone edition that work better than the edition that the consumer currently has (Negi & Pabalkar, 2020; Srivastava et al., 2022). This is directed towards the actual state types and is very effective as Apple leverages influencer marketing to impact particular target audiences (Negi & Pabalkar, 2020; Srivastava et al., 2022). Second, in keeping the desired state type consumers are up-to-date with the latest trends, new styles and shopping outlets in the fashion industry (Negi & Pabalkar, 2020; Saleem, 2023). Zara, which is an international fashion brand, demonstrates an example of this, by pairing with Barbie, an internationally famous doll which spans generations of consumers since its introduction in 1959 (Lord, 2024; Schwartz, 2023). The movie Barbie was released in July 2023, starring the celebrity/mega-influencer Margot Robbie and Zara strategically released a Barbie clothing collection at this time (Schwartz, 2023). This was directed at the desired state type consumers and many social media influencers disseminated content about Zara store's new Barbie line (Royle, 2023). This yielded exponential profits for Zara, despite the global economic challenges and financial constraints as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Royle, 2023).

According to Negi and Pabalkar (2020), brand influencers (macro-influencers), bloggers (social/micro-influencers) and celebrities (mega-influencers) all had a high and equal average percentage of impact on consumers' need recognition (Negi & Pabalkar, 2020). Furthermore, a study based on South African consumers described influencers as conversation catalysts, sharing recommendations and information on products and services (Kleintjes, 2017). Consumers rely on them for brand information and ideas that appeal to the needs of both actual state and desired state types (Kleintjes, 2017).

Stage 2: Pre-purchase search: During this stage, the consumer has conceived the idea that their need will be fulfilled by the purchase and consumption of the product or service (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). The consumer then bases their choice of purchase on past purchases and information gained there (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). If the consumer does not have any past experiences or information, they will do an extensive search for information about which product or brand to base their choice on (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Avhad et al. (2020) further state that organisations in India are increasingly making use of influencers and realise their value in encouraging consumers to make purchases, as well as providing them with ample information on various products and services. From a South African perspective, a study found that in addition to influencers sharing content that provides Millennials with ample information

on products and services, influencers also encourage consumers to engage in brand-related conversations and to generate UGC (Kleintjes, 2017). Through this process, consumers' exposure to products and services is enhanced and assists in their decision-making process (Kleintjes, 2017).

Stage 3: Evaluation of alternatives: Once the consumer has all the relevant information on the brand or product, they will rank them and then evaluate each against the others in an attempt to find the best choice of product or service for purchase (Qazzafi, 2019). Kotler and Keller (2015) further state that this evaluation is based on the brand's affordability, quality and ability to provide the highest benefit to the consumer. Influencers have a responsibility when they are attached to a brand to do their best to market the products and services to stand out in comparison to competition or alternative brands (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). In addition, brand association and word of mouth that influencers generate assist consumers during this stage (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). A South African study based on Generation Z found that these consumers prefer to use eWOM as a source of information when evaluating alternatives for their purchase decision (Pillay, 2021). Generation Z regards eWOM as authentic, bringing about brand love, brand loyalty and brand trust (Pillay, 2021). Brand switching is the highest for Generation Z in South Africa and it is, therefore, important for influencers to engage in eWOM during this stage (Pillay, 2021).

Stage 4: Purchase decision: During this step, the consumer decides to buy a product or service after gathering all the information from several sources and evaluating it against competition (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). The consumer will select the product or service for purchase of the brand that ranked highest according to their evaluation (Qazzafi, 2019). A study conducted in America found that, on average, for every 1 USD (United States dollar) invested in influencer marketing, the brands received a ROI of 6.5 USD from sales generated (Foster, 2022). Influencers are very powerful in their ability to impact this stage and even to close sales both indirectly and directly (Foster, 2022).

In terms of younger, South African consumers, eWOM generated by influencers also serves as a key driver of purchases because consumers find the messages that influencers generate to be more authentic and trustworthy in comparison to marketing messages that companies or brands circulate (Kleintjes, 2017; Ramela et al., 2022). Furthermore, a study found that purchases made by South African Millennials are very much guided by the video content that influencers

create and post (Roux, 2020). The reason for this is that these consumers are drawn to the content as it is engaging and informative in relation to their purchase decisions (Roux, 2020).

Stage 5: Post-purchase evaluation: The last stage of this process occurs after the consumer has purchased the product or service (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). This is based on the consumer's satisfaction with the product or service after consumption, which is impacted by consumer perceived value versus consumer expectation (Qazzafi, 2019). According to Qazzafi (2019), if the consumer's perceived value matches the expectation that the consumer had of the brand, then the consumer will be satisfied. However, if the consumer's perceived value is lower than the consumer's expectation, then the consumer will be dissatisfied (Qazzafi, 2019).

Influencers play an important role in this phase, with the two-way communication between them and consumers in their post-purchase phase that social media facilitates (Rahmah et al., 2019). Through this communication, influencers are able to address any area of concern or complaints that consumers may have and companies are then able to make amendments to the products and services from this feedback to suit consumer needs better (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Influencers are also able to receive positive feedback and, in accordance, continue to keep consumers satisfied (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018). Consumer satisfaction thus needs to be ensured post-purchase through this communication and customer service, which in turn will increase customer loyalty and consumer retention (Rahmah et al., 2019). Additionally, this will also generate positive word of mouth and eWOM, increasing sales and thereby increasing the organisation's profits and growth (Rahmah et al., 2019). A South African study based on younger consumers found that consumers in the post-purchase phase will also evaluate the alignment of the review from the influencer to the quality of the product or service that was purchased and the level of satisfaction that the consumer derived from the product or service (Moodley, 2021). Consumers will base their future trust in influencer reviews and eWOM on the level of this alignment (Moodley, 2021).

2.9.2 Effectiveness of brand communication content of influencers on social media on consumer purchase decisions

Social media usage is on the rise with an increasing number of users every day and it is therefore the best platform to communicate brand messages using the powerful tool of influencer marketing (Hannu & Johannisson 2020; Jayasinghe, 2020). According to Jayasinghe (2020), influencer marketing, as part of a company's communication strategy, is essential since

influencers serve the organisation as message mediators, online brand ambassadors and even storytellers. Marketers aim to create brand love, customer engagement and loyalty through influencer marketing which increases consumer purchases (Jayasignhe, 2020). According to Joshi et al. (2023), the market is flooded with advertising messages. Subsequently, a study has shown that many consumers avoid marketing messages as they feel overwhelmed by the volume of these messages (Holiday et al., 2023). However, in contrast, influencers have the ability to connect with consumers directly, allowing for two-way communication (dialogue) (Bakker, 2018; Renchen, 2020). Influencers are therefore able to surpass the barrier of consumers being overwhelmed to convey brand communication messages more effectively (Bakker, 2018; Renchen, 2020).

Furthermore, influencers are successful at brand communication because they are viewed as consumers who are guiding other consumers on products and services (Renchen, 2020). Renchen (2020) states that there is a level of trust in the messages that influencers communicate, as they do so in a targeted way to create brand awareness, increase purchases and promote consumption for brands.

According to a study conducted in Sweden, 98% of younger consumers use social media and influencer marketing is used by 75% of Swedish organisations as a powerful and essential tool for brand communication on these platforms to target consumer needs and increase purchases (Hannu & Johannisson 2020). In this study, 35% of the respondents claimed that influencer marketing had resulted in their purchase intention and 57% of these consumers linked this purchase intention to an actual purchase (Hannu & Johannisson 2020). According to a study undertaken in the Netherlands, influencer marketing brand communication tends to be more successful in resulting in purchases when it does not look as if it is paid for by companies (Bakker, 2018). Influencer marketing brand communication needs to feel authentic and personal to the consumer for it to increase purchases (Leung et al., 2022). The study in the Netherlands found that 31% of consumers purchased after coming across influencers' brand communication on social media (Bakker, 2018).

From a young South African consumer perspective, a study found that e-commerce and influencer marketing account for 50% of the total sales in the country (Pillay, 2021). For Generation Z, 88% of consumers spend their time on social media searching for information and reviews (Pillay, 2021). Furthermore, Pillay (2021) states that Generation Z in South Africa has the highest level of brand switching. It is therefore important that companies use influencer

marketing as part of their brand communication in relation to customer retention and purchase intent (Duffett & Maraule, 2024). An additional study in South Africa based on younger consumers, found that brand communication through influencer marketing is effective in increasing consumer purchases, as it builds relationships with consumers causing them to remember the essence of the messages and to take the action to make a purchase (Moodley, 2021).

2.9.3 Influence of eWOM through content sharing on social media on consumer purchase decisions

Electronic word of mouth originated from the concept of word of mouth, which can be described as two-way communication between consumers as reviews on products and services serve as a guideline with regard to making their purchase decisions (Farha et al., 2017). This concept is causing a decline in the effectiveness of traditional marketing media strategies (Dwiputra et al., 2021). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is, therefore, described as modernised word of mouth, which over social media has given consumers far more power as the comments and peer-to-peer recommendations are done on a much larger scale (Farha et al., 2017).

Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) state that although marketers have no control over eWOM, it is one of the best sources of consumer information. Marketers have the ability to pay careful attention and can improve areas that are lacking as a result of the information shared by consumers through eWOM (Dwiputra et al., 2021). Consumers also value and view eWOM as more credible and trustworthy than company marketing adverts, causing eWOM to be largely successful in conveying its message (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). A study based in Thailand found that marketers can make use of influencers as a tool to engage in eWOM and generate positive messages about their brands, resulting in increased consumer purchases (Thant, 2019). Subsequently, influencer marketing proved to be a very powerful means, resulting in great success for brands as it was efficient in the promotion of consumers' purchase decisions (Dwiputra et al., 2021; Thant, 2019). Influencer marketing was also found to be cost-effective as compared to traditional media, in generating positive eWOM related to consumers' purchase decisions (Dwiputra et al., 2021; Thant, 2019).

According to Pillay (2021), from a South African perspective, eWOM has shown exponential growth over the past 10 years and has a great influence on consumer purchases. Furthermore,

76% of consumers (Generation Z) read reviews of products and services online (eWOM) (Pillay, 2021). Generation Z trusts the eWOM more than is generated by influencers as opposed to other sources because it allows them to interact and be more informed on products and services so that they are confident in the purchases that they make (Sabina & Marsasi, 2024). Generation Z, South African consumers, appreciate the authenticity and honesty that comes across in influencer-generated eWOM and this helps consumers to foster a relationship with the brand ensuring brand loyalty and repeat purchases (Sabina & Marsasi, 2024).

2.9.4 Effectiveness of influencer marketing on purchase decisions during the covid-19 pandemic

2.9.4.1 Background on COVID-19

The coronavirus, also known as COVID-19 can be described as a deadly virus that originated in Wuhan, China in 2019 (Mkhize, 2021). This virus caused severe health effects in people once it was contracted, such as respiratory illness, loss of taste, smell, cough and fever (Australian Government, 2020; Richbourg, 2022). COVID-19 spread very quickly throughout the world, owing to people travelling, since they were carriers of the virus (Mkhize, 2021). On 5 March 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was found in South Africa (Mkhize, 2021). In South Africa the virus also spread at an alarming rate and, subsequently, the number of deaths also increased. To curb the spread, and in an attempt to gain control, because people were carriers of the COVID-19 virus, on 23 March 2020 the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, together with the National Command Council, declared a national lockdown for 21 days (Sekyere et al., 2020). During this period, most of the population in South Africa was ordered to stay home and self-quarantine and were only allowed to leave home for groceries and prescription medication (Mkhize, 2021; Richbourg 2022).

According to Sekyere et al. (2020), the national lockdown had a very negative impact on the economy with a lack of activity owing to the rules that most of the workforce had to stay at home and minimise travelling during this period. Subsequently, a study based on South African organisations shows that 85,4% of businesses across various sectors experienced a decrease in their turnover and faced losses owing to the lockdown and stay at home restrictions (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

In contrast, however, studies that analysed companies abroad in various countries, showed that those that had an online strategy and social media presence were less impacted by the pandemic

and the lockdown period because of the enhanced consumer experience and service delivery through this digital channel (Itliong, 2020; Richbourg, 2022).

2.9.4.2 Informativeness of online content during lockdown

According to Yang (2021), online platforms provided varied genres of information to people during the lockdown. A study conducted in the US stated that online platforms such as websites provided much-needed updates on what was transpiring in the country as well as information for online shopping during the lockdown (Yang, 2021). Subsequently, consumer online shopping in the United States of America (USA) increased by 32.4% during the COVID-19 pandemic (Richbourg, 2022). However, there was also a lack of information online from the USA in relation to coping mechanisms, both emotional and health-wise, which was also not well communicated verbally by the government (Yang et al., 2021).

According to Vo (2023), influencers played a pivotal role in the informativeness of online content during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the continually advancing market and a myriad of new products and services being introduced, a majority of consumers, especially Generation Z, tend to avoid reading the labels of products or to do their own research on products and services as they are overwhelmed by the different choices that are available to them for purchase (Vo, 2023). Consumers therefore rely heavily on the star ratings and reviews for products and services online (Chan, 2022; West, 2021). A star rating can be defined as a ranking scale, with the measurement being the number of stars the product or service has been awarded (SiteMinder, 2024). According to SiteMinder (2024), the star rating generally ranges from one to five; however, in the hospitality industry, which is graded by formal prominent organisations, it can range from one to seven. This gives consumers a good idea of the product or service and influences their purchase intention on the basis of quality, durability, effectiveness, practicality, discounted prices and how popularly used the product or service is (Francisco et al., 2021). During the lockdown, influencer star rating posts for the hospitality industry were not considered very informative or useful by consumers owing to the negative impact that the lockdown restrictions had on travel (World Economic Forum, 2021). However, a study conducted in Finland showed that more than 83% of consumers followed influencers on social media during the lockdown, as they appreciated the informativeness of influencers' reviews and star ratings on other products (books, clothing and make-up) and service (restaurants) categories that were tailored to their interests (Vo, 2023). Furthermore, studies have shown that information quality and the ability to learn about products through influencer marketing during

the lockdown had a direct impact on the majority of consumers' purchase intentions (Francisco et al., 2021; Islamia & Khan, 2020).

2.9.4.3 Reliance on influencer marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic

According to Whitney and Guthrie (2020), during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers sought more than just being sold to by influencers on social media. The focus for consumers was not heavily based on the influencer economy, which is defined as a multi-billion-dollar industry consisting of all the influencers on social media and their tools which are used to leverage financial gain (Richbourg, 2022). Subsequently, consumers relied on influencer marketing for the sense of connection that they received from it during the pandemic (Richbourg, 2022). The craving for these virtual connections was driven by consumers' state of uncertainty, the losses of both loved ones and jobs (Ratnapertiwi et al., 2021). Influencer marketing conveyed messages on social media that softened the harshness of facing reality during the pandemic through conveying an admirable sense of humour, hope and resilience (Surjandy & Agatha, 2022). The reliance that consumers developed on influencer marketing during the pandemic, based on the positive messages disseminated, also resulted in increased online business, with 64.7% more consumers interested in buying products linked to influencer endorsements (Ratnapertiwi et al., 2021; Surjandy & Agatha, 2022).

Furthermore, the mental health of consumers globally was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kapse et al., 2022). Owing to the lockdown and lack of interaction, daily routine and restraints, consumers experienced feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness and suicidal thoughts. Influencer marketing was highly relied on for these conditions as well, since it supported consumers through the challenges they were experiencing emotionally (Kapse et al., 2022). For example, a middle-aged father, Rob Kenny, started a YouTube channel as well as a TikTok page known as, 'Dad, how do I?' (Hohman, 2020). This page shares his journey and the challenges he faced growing up as well as disseminating positive messages ('Wisdom Wednesday'), Do It Yourself (DIY) guidelines for things around the house, repairs for cars such as changing a tyre, products and service reviews and many humorous 'dad jokes' (Collins, 2021). Rob Kenny's videos went viral on many occasions during the pandemic, with a huge following of over two million followers and, consequently, a great impact on consumers' choice of products and services purchased. An example is the Firestone Complete Auto Care brand of products that Kenny endorses in his videos, paired with his gift card giveaways, that consumers are able to redeem at a Firestone branch for products such as tyres or even services offered

(Kothar, 2021; Roy, 2021). Influencers like these provided a sense of community and supported consumers through the COVID-19 pandemic (Kothar, 2021).

2.9.4.4 Trustworthiness of content during COVID-19

According to Flew (2021), consumption and purchases of many products and services did increase during the pandemic as a result of consumer trust in online-generated content by influencers. However, for specific products and services, such as those of a precautionary nature (face masks, hand sanitiser and COVID-19 vaccines) and staple or day-to-day products and services (bread, milk, canned goods and domestic cleaning services), consumers' level of trust in influencer messages and the news that they were disseminating during the COVID-19 pandemic, was impacted in a negative way (Flew, 2021). This was as a result of influencer messages not always being accurate and, in many instances, labelled as fake news or misleading information by the government in various countries, health officials, and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Flew, 2021). The World Health Organization is a global institution that is trusted for accurate information regarding matters related to mental, physical and social well-being (Meisnere et al., 2023). This became a key concern because of the negative consequences, with regard to health scares, excessive panic buying and, consequently, shortages of certain products and services, distress, vaccine avoidance, mask refusal and the purchase and consumption of medication/resorting to methods of treatment for the virus that could impact more harm on consumers (Caceres et al., 2022).

Globally, a series of consumer-protection interventions were, consequently, put in place by governments in response to the misinformation that was being spread online during the pandemic (Shah & Wei, 2022). For example, social media corporations collaborated with governments and health organisations to clarify misinformation (Caceres et al., 2022). There were also smartphone applications that were created such as 'Stop the Spread' and 'Reporting of Misinformation', with punitive measures for influencers who disseminate incorrect information as well as for fellow consumers who shared those posts thereafter via eWOM (Caceres et al., 2022). Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which work in various countries towards the promotion of health and safety, advised online users to search for trustworthy information regarding the pandemic, purchases of products and services, and updates on regulations on social media by using hashtags, in particular, #COVID-19 (Caceres et al., 2022; Carande-Kulis, 2022).

According to Shah and Wei (2022), the trustworthiness of online information, more especially related to precautionary/staple products and services during the pandemic should be based on the credibility of the source and the level of accuracy and quality of the messages disseminated by the influencer. In 2022, during the pandemic, a project was launched on social media, to assist users with trustworthy information online, called #ShareTheMicNow (Caceres et al., 2022). This was to allow mega-influencers to share their social media accounts so that professional medical advice could be given that could be trusted and have a sensible influence on consumers' purchases (Caceres et al., 2022). Julia Roberts was one of the first mega-influencers to participate in #ShareTheMicNow, by handing over her Instagram account to Dr. Anthony Fauci, who treated several COVID cases during the pandemic (Britannica, 2024; Caceres et al., 2022). This collaboration with influencer marketing, regarding consumers and accurate information relating to their consumption of products and services, reflected a much-needed increase in the level of trustworthiness of online content during the COVID-19 pandemic (Britannica, 2024).

2.9.4.5 Increase in purchases as a result of influencer content during COVID-19

COVID-19 had a major impact on the economy and caused severe negative effects on businesses and organisations (Yeyati & Filippini, 2021). In terms of consumers, COVID-19 impacted all sectors regarding purchase intentions (Retail Economics, 2020). According to Sheth (2020), many shoppers resorted to online shopping, one avenue that benefitted from COVID-19. Consumers felt protected and safe from the virus when shopping online, above and beyond the convenience that it provides (Sheth, 2020).

Francisco et al. (2021) further state that, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and consumers' changing buying patterns, companies were forced to adapt their brand strategies, with marketers shifting budgets drastically away from traditional media and more into digital advertising and influencer marketing. In response to these changes, marketers are shifting their brand strategies from just focusing on products and services to communicating values through their brands to the consumers' new normal that they faced (Francisco et al., 2021). There is a lack of information on how COVID-19 lockdown restrictions affected influencer marketing-related purchases, which has created a need for investigation from a South African, Generation Z perspective (Csobanka, 2016; Geyser, 2022; Joshi et al., 2023; Letko, 2019).

2.9.4.6 Attitudes towards products endorsed by influencers during lockdown

A study conducted in Spain stated that consumers have a higher level of perceived risk pre-purchase of a high-involvement product or service than of a low-involvement product or service (Cabeza-Ramirez et al., 2022). A high-involvement product or service entails higher costs and therefore more time that a consumer will spend during the decision-making process and evaluation of alternatives process in order to attain value for money, in contrast with a low-involvement product or service, which refers to day-to-day consumables that are more reasonable in price (Arachchige et al., 2022). Furthermore, during the lockdown, unprecedented variables existed, such as scarce availability of certain products owing to panic buying, increases in prices because of increased demand or increased company costs, which also caused consumers to develop a cautious attitude in relation to purchase intention (Cabeza-Ramirez et al., 2022). The higher level of perceived risk also caused consumers to be apprehensive about purchases; however, positive reviews by influencers have been shown to lower this pre-purchase level of risk and to change consumers' attitudes to being more favourable towards making purchases (Cabeza-Ramirez et al., 2022).

Furthermore, a study in Australia stated that consumers develop a sense of trust, which creates a positive attitude towards products, when influencers exercise transparency, possess greater product knowledge and disclose whether their endorsements are sponsored (Kay et al., 2020). This proved to increase influencer credibility and consumer purchase intentions more than when consumers were exposed to influencer posts for which sponsorships were not disclosed (Kay et al., 2020). Consumers during the lockdown also developed an attitude towards influencer endorsements of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) (Dinh et al., 2021). FOMO can be defined as a need that is developed to keep up with trends and society, a fear of not experiencing the excitement or fulfilment that others are experiencing (Elhai, 2020). FOMO creates a drive in consumers to purchase and this attitude towards endorsements also increases the potential of the influencer's posts of going viral (Dinh et al., 2021).

2.10 CONCLUSION

The review of literature in this chapter, in relation to influencer marketing, provides valuable insights for marketers and businesses. The factors that enhance consumer perceptions of brands, influencer credibility and consumer purchases through influencer marketing were explored. This study also aims to contribute to the body of knowledge in closing the gaps that were identified in this chapter. The next chapter will focus on the research methodology of which this study made use.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology can be defined as a means to solve a research problem, through the study of research that is carried out scientifically (University of Pretoria, 2023). There are various steps that the researcher undertakes and the research method chosen helps to draw conclusions about a phenomenon (University of Pretoria, 2023).

This chapter comprises a discussion of the sampling technique and the data collection method that was used in this study. A description of the population and the sample used in this study is stipulated. There is also a description of the research instrument that was used and the instrument's validity and reliability. Finally, this chapter will discuss the data analysis, with reference to both descriptive and inferential statistics.

3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the evolution of technology and the resultant lack of effectiveness of traditional marketing, organisations are adapting and applying increasingly successful online marketing strategies as these companies need to recover from the decline in the use of traditional media (Dhlamini, 2023; Le Bon, 2020). One of these online marketing strategies which is growing exponentially is influencer marketing (Avhad et al., 2020; Hannu & Johannisson, 2020; Jayasinghe, 2020). However, despite its effectiveness, there is a lack of research that explores the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour from a university student perspective (Ahmad et al., 2021; Fromm & Read, 2019; Letko, 2019). Influencer marketing (IM) is a largely unexplored topic in a South African context, hence, the reason for this study (Geyser, 2022; Greenfield, 2021; Singhania et al., 2021). Furthermore, in order to understand the purchase intentions of university students or younger consumers (Generation Z), it is essential to analyse the perceptions of influencer marketing from a Generation Z perspective as this will provide insight into the impact that influencer marketing has on the perceptions of brands and of purchase behaviour. This will ultimately guide marketers in developing strategies for active engagement with this target market.

3.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To determine the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' perceptions of brands. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study include:
 - 1.1. To determine if influencer marketing has an effect on UKZN students' attitudes towards brands.
 - 1.2. To uncover UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality).
 - 1.3. To investigate the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour.
2. To ascertain the impact that influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) has on UKZN students' purchasing decisions.
3. To investigate the effect that influencer marketing has on the purchasing behaviour of UKZN students. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study include:
 - 3.1. To determine if brand communication content of influencers on social media influenced UKZN students' purchase decisions.
 - 3.2. To uncover the influence that electronic word of mouth through content sharing on social media has on the purchase decisions of UKZN students.
 - 3.3. To ascertain UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online brand content of influencers on purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. To formulate creative influencer marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH APPROACH/PARADIGM

A research design can be defined as a plan that is created to answer research questions through the collection, measurement and analysis of data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This study made use of an empirical research design, owing to the topic being particularly unexplored and the lack of information available concerning the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour from a University of KwaZulu-Natal student perspective. Empirical research is not based on belief or theory, but rather measured and observed phenomena that derives knowledge from actual experience (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). An empirical research design plays a vital role in internal validity (Saunders et al., 2009).

There are three research approaches that a researcher can use when carrying out a study, namely, quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodology approaches (Hair et al., 2013). Quantitative research can be defined as being derived from numbers, as well as collecting results in numerical data and, thereafter, the analysis is done using diagrams and statistics by means of which samples are generalised to the target population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). For a quantitative research approach, data collection involves questionnaires, observation and experiments (Saunders et al., 2009). However, a qualitative research approach helps to provide insight and a deeper understanding into the reason that a problem exists. Data collection methods for a qualitative research approach involve the research techniques of individual interviews, focus groups and participant observation (Saunders et al., 2009). Furthermore, mixed methodology involves a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Dawadi et al., 2021). A quantitative approach was used for this study, as it is more suitable to large sample sizes and is, therefore, a good fit for the population that was used in this study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Furthermore, based on the magnitude of the sample size of this study and the number of research objectives, close-ended questions were more timeous in nature to capture and analyse.

There are multiple advantages to using a quantitative approach, such as the research problem being well-defined and detailed, and that precise information needs are agreed upon (Hair et al., 2013). Hair et al. (2013) further state that quantitative research enables researchers and organisations to identify important trends, test hypotheses regarding the relationships between variables and solve marketing problems.

3.5 STUDY SITE

The University of KwaZulu-Natal comprises five campuses, namely Edgewood Campus, Howard Campus, Westville Campus, the School of Medicine and Pietermaritzburg Campus. For the purpose of this study's research, the University's Westville Campus was used. This is a large campus and includes three different colleges. In addition, the researcher is based at the Westville Campus and the selection of this campus was considered to be feasible owing to resource and time constraints, as well as to the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place.

3.6 TARGET POPULATION

A population for the purpose of research can be defined as the entire group of people, events or things that are utilised by the researcher, in making inferences to provide answers to the research questions that are based on the research problem (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A target population for research can be described as the complete group of elements that the researcher identifies based on the objectives (Hair et al., 2013).

For the purposes of this study, the target population was students (postgraduate and undergraduate) at the Westville Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, who had registered for the 2022 year. The Westville Campus comprises different Colleges: the College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science, the College of Law and Management Studies and the College of Health Sciences. The rationale for focusing on students from the Westville campus was that this campus houses the majority of the Management Studies students who should have a basic knowledge of marketing concepts as they were exposed to these topics in their curriculum. Table 3.1 outlines the number of students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the 2022 academic year. According to Table 3.1, the population for this study comprised 10510 subjects.

3.7 SAMPLE

A sample can be described as a subset, comprising some members, also known as participants, of the population (Alvi, 2016; Saunders et al., 2009; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to Hair et al. (2013), drawing a sample from the population facilitates the researcher's ability to draw conclusions about the population of interest. As a result, the sample is said to be generalisable to the population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Table 3.1: University of KwaZulu-Natal, Institutional Intelligence Reports: Student Registration by College and Campus (2022)

College	UG	PG	Howard	PMB	Med Sch	Westville	Edgewood	TOTAL
COLLEGE OF AGR, ENG & SCIENCE	6545	1531	2140	2377		3559		8076
COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES	4249	1961	995		2434	2781		6210
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES	17293	3043	8728	4224			7384	20336
COLLEGE OF LAW & MAN STUDIES	5264	2352	1715	1731		4170		7616
TOTAL	33351	8887	13578	8332	2434	10510	7384	42238

Source: UKZN (2022)

3.8 SAMPLING METHOD

There are two types of sampling methods, probability and non-probability sampling (Hair et al., 2013). Non-probability sampling can be described as each element in the population having an unknown chance of being selected (Saunders et al., 2009; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In some cases, generalisation to the population can be made with this sampling type (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Non-probability sampling methods comprise convenience sampling, quota sampling and judgement sampling (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Probability sampling can be defined as a method by which each unit in the population has an equal chance of being chosen to be used in the sample (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). It is therefore non-biased (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). These methods include area sampling, systematic sampling, double sampling, simple random sampling, cluster sampling and stratified simple sampling (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

It is a subjective choice of the researcher as to which type of sampling is used. For the purpose of this study, owing to cost, time and financial constraints, a non-probability method, namely convenience sampling was used. Convenience sampling can be defined as the collection of data from a population that the researcher is able to reach effortlessly (Golzar & Tajik, 2022). Golzar and Tajik (2022) also state that, when using convenience sampling, the researcher is able to go

to the public or to a public online platform and request that suitable candidates participate. Convenience sampling is suitable for almost any research study (Golzar & Tajik, 2022). This is highly beneficial in its advantage of ease and it is less expensive and quicker compared to probability sampling (Golzar & Tajik, 2022; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Table 3.2 describes the different probability and non-probability methods.

Table 3.2: Probability and Non-Probability Sampling Designs

Probability and Nonprobability Sampling Designs			
Sampling Design	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Probability Sampling:			
1. Simple Random Sampling	All elements in the population are considered and each element has an equal chance of being chosen as the subject.	High generalization of findings.	Not as efficient as stratified sampling.
2. Systematic sampling	Every Nth element in the population is chosen starting from a random point in the population frame.	Easy to use if population frame is available.	Systematic biases are possible.
3. Stratified random sampling (Str.R.S)	Population is first divided into meaningful segments, thereafter subjects are drawn in proportion to their original numbers in the population.	Most efficient among all probability designs. All groups are adequately sampled and comparisons among groups are possible.	Stratification must be meaningful. More time-consuming than simple random sampling or systematic sampling.
Proportionate Str.R.S	Based on criteria other than their original population numbers.		Population frame for each stratum is essential.
Disproportionate Str.R.S			
4. Cluster sampling	Groups that have heterogenous members are first identified; then some are chosen at random; all the members in each of the randomly chosen groups are studied.	In geographic clusters, costs of data collection are low.	The least reliable and efficient among all probability sampling designs since subsets of clusters are more homogenous than heterogenous.
5. Area sampling	Cluster sampling within a particular area or locality.	Cost-effective. Useful for decisions relating to a particular location. Offers more detailed information on the topic of study.	Takes time to collect data from an area.
6. Double sampling	The same sample or a subset of the sample is studied twice.	Offers more detailed information on the topic of study.	Original biases, if any, will be carried over. Individuals may not be happy responding a second time.
Nonprobability Sampling:			
7. Convenience sampling	The most easily accessible members are chosen as subjects.	Quick, convenient, less expensive.	Not generalizable at all.
8. Judgement sampling	Subjects selected on the basis of their expertise in the subject investigated.	Sometimes, the only meaningful way to investigate.	Generalizability is questionable; not generalizable to entire population.
9. Quota sampling	Subjects are conveniently chosen from targeted groups according to some predetermined number of quota.	Very useful where minority participation in a study is critical.	Not easily generalizable.

Source: Sekaran and Bougie (2014).

Table 3.2 indicates the differences in the sampling designs. This table also displays the different types of methods that can be used under each design, gives a description of each and provides the advantages and disadvantages respectively.

3.9 SAMPLE SIZE

The number of students registered at UKZN’s Westville Campus for 2022 was 10510. For the purpose of this study, the population-to-sample size table by Sekaran and Bougie (2016) is used to calculate the study sample. The table (Table 3.3) provides an appropriate sample size of 375 subjects.

Table 3.3: Population-to-Sample Size Table

N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

Source: Sekaran and Bougie (2014).

3.10 DATA COLLECTION

Taherdoost (2021) describes data collection as the process by which the researcher spends quality time gathering data to ensure the accuracy of findings. As the research objectives and questions are defined for a study, an appropriate data collection method must be chosen in accordance to provide answers (Golzar & Tajik, 2022; Skinner, 2007). This section outlines the sources of data (primary and secondary) and the data collection instrument, which is a questionnaire.

3.10.1 Source of data

There are two types of data that are collected; primary data and secondary data (Morgan & Harmon, 2010; Taherdoost, 2021). Primary data can be defined as that which is sourced or obtained by the researcher for the first time. According to the Benedictine University Library (2023), primary data can be gathered from surveys, experiments, interviews, administering questionnaires, focus groups or observations. Secondary data can be defined as data that is being re-used by the researcher as it has been gathered previously (Hair et al., 2013). Secondary data can be gathered from publications, books, websites, internal records and journal articles (Benedictine University, 2023).

3.10.2 Questionnaires

This study utilised quantitative research techniques and a close-ended questionnaire was administered to students. A questionnaire, which is also referred to as a research instrument, can be defined as a document that is used to gather primary data, consisting of questions and scales (Hair et al., 2013). The use of closed-ended questions in the questionnaire helps the respondents in the research study to answer the questionnaire in a short period of time (Hair et al., 2013).

Furthermore, questionnaires are most commonly utilised because of the fact that each respondent is asked to answer the same set of questions providing efficiency for collecting data from greater sample sizes (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, questionnaires are also described as being very effective since all feedback from respondents can be interpreted in the same way. Analysis can also be applied to comparisons of the feedback (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014; Siniscalco & Auriat, 2005). This research instrument is utilised for descriptive research,

enabling the description of variability in a phenomenon. It is also used for exploratory research, allowing for the explanation of relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.10.3 Construction of the questionnaire

For this study, the questionnaire was divided into two sections, namely, Section A and Section B. Section A consisted of the biographical information of participants, where a nominal scale was used. This included categories such as race, educational level, gender, College and age. A nominal scale uses labelled variables that are mutually exclusive and do not have any numerical significance for the process of classification and identification (Wilson & Mohr, 2021). The benefits of using nominal scales include the ease of categorisation, enabling the researcher to classify, summarise and compare data (Benedictine University, 2023). It is also simple for respondents to comprehend when answering, according to the categories that apply to them (Benedictine University, 2023).

Section B was based on the key dimensions of the study and used an ordinal scale known as the 5-point Likert scale (Hair et al., 2013). Responses ranged from 1 to 5:

1. Strongly disagree (SD)
2. Disagree (D)
3. Neither agree nor disagree (N)
4. Agree (A)
5. Strongly Agree (SA)

These distinct categories allowed students to select a numerical value (1 to 5) in accordance with their perceptions of each dimension in this study. The ordinal scale, therefore, rank -orders the categories in a meaningful way (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Benefits of the ordinal scale include ease of analysis and comparison of data according to the rankings, ease of understanding for participants, and it provides more information in comparison to the nominal scale (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Wilson & Mohr, 2021).

The questionnaires were administered electronically. All registered students at UKZN's Westville Campus were emailed a link to the questionnaire, together with the Letter of Informed Consent via the University Notices. Students who agreed voluntarily to participate in this study were able to access the questionnaire online.

3.10.4 In-house pretesting and pilot testing

Pilot testing a questionnaire is crucial and provides an array of benefits and insight (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), pilot testing can be described as the process by which the researcher administers the questionnaire to a smaller, representative group of respondents. These respondents are requested to fill out the questionnaire and subsequently provide feedback to the researcher (Hair et al., 2013). The purpose of pilot testing is to identify aspects of the research instrument that may be ambiguous and to ascertain the comprehension of questions. The researcher will then make corrections accordingly. For this study, a pilot test consisting of 15 participants was conducted to allow the researcher to make necessary adjustments and changes to the questionnaire. The respondents were selected from the target population. Based on the respondents' feedback to the questionnaire, there were no changes that were necessary.

3.11 DATA QUALITY CONTROL

Data quality control ensures the accuracy, consistency and truthfulness of the information (Dawadi et al., 2021). Validity and reliability will be explored in this section.

3.11.1 Validity

Validity can be described as the degree to which a concept or theory is measured accurately by researchers (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Validity can be determined by applying the following tests: face validity, construct validity, criterion-related validity, formative validity, and sampling validity (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Face validity measures a subjective view, which is based on the relevance of the test to the participants (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). Construct validity is the degree to which a test measures what it claims to be measuring (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Criterion-related validity measures how well one measure estimates the outcome of another measure (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). Formative validity is applied to assess, how well a measure can provide information to assist the research study (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Sampling validity refers to, how well the validity test covers all of the spectrums that the research study intended to cover (Hair et al., 2013).

For the purpose of this study, validity was measured using factor analysis, which can be defined as “a multivariate technique that confirms the dimensions of the concept that have been

operationally defined, as well as indicating which of these items are most appropriate for each dimension” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 222).

Validity was established and maintained in the questionnaires, with uniform and consistent questions that the respondents answered and also with the assurance that each dimension of this study was covered thoroughly in the questions.

3.11.2 Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested for consistency and stability (Hair et al., 2013). The measure of reliability should test that the instrument produces the same results under the same conditions consistently (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The stability was determined by the way the measure was applied to the research study. The statistical test to measure the internal consistency was Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha (Hair et al., 2013). The Cronbach Coefficient Alpha test also indicates how closely related the items in the set are as a group. When the value is high for Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha (close to 1), it means that there is a high level of consistency (Hair et al., 2013). For the purpose of this research study, the measure of consistency indicated how well the variables of the questionnaire fit together in the set. When results of Cronbach’s Alpha are above 60%, the results are considered reliable (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The Cronbach’s Alpha for this study was 95.8%, which demonstrates a strong level of reliability.

3.12 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process by which the researcher examines the data that has been gathered (Hair et al., 2013). This process enables the discovery of patterns within the data that are of interest to the researcher (Hair et al., 2013). Furthermore, Sekaran and Bougie (2016) state that the process of data analysis allows the researcher to draw conclusions about the study and entails the coding, organising and interpreting of data. Data from this study were captured and coded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Thereafter, they were transferred into the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) to analyse the data further. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used during the process of data analysis.

3.12.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics can be described as those that form the basis for analysing quantitative data and consist of frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

3.12.1.1 Frequencies and percentages

Frequency is defined as the number of times that a value occurs in the data set (Hair et al., 2013). The frequency can be calculated from the cumulative percentage of the occurrence of a phenomenon (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Percentages are also very useful to illustrate relationships that exist between variables (Lund Research, 2016). With the use of frequencies, the researcher can present the accumulative data through tables, pie charts, bar charts or histograms, which assist the researcher to comprehend data more simply (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The biographical information of students that was obtained from the questionnaire was depicted on pie charts. This comprises students' gender, age, race, educational level and college at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Westville Campus.

3.12.1.2 Measures of central tendency

The measures of central tendency comprise the mean, median and mode.

Mean

The mean is known as the average measure of central tendency (Hair et al., 2013). It offers an overall representation of each dimension with a numerical average value of the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Frequency and mean analyses were conducted for Section B of the questionnaire in this study, which included the key dimensions (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Median

The median refers to the middle value in the data set (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). To calculate the median, the researcher must arrange the data set in ascending order (Lund Research, 2016; Sharma, 2019).

Mode

The mode is the value that occurs repeatedly in the data set (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). A data set that does not have any recurring value will have no mode (Hair et al., 2013). The representation of the mode on a graph will always have the highest point on the graph of the data distribution (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

3.12.1.3 Measures of dispersion

The measures of dispersion determine how spread out the data set is (Saunders et al., 2009). The measures of dispersion can be calculated as the range, standard deviation and variance (Lund Research, 2016; Sharma, 2019).

Range

The range refers to the difference between the highest and lowest value in the data set (Hair et al., 2013). It is therefore calculated by subtracting the minimum value from the maximum value in the data set (Saunders et al., 2009). Although outliers in data do pose some limitations, the range is still an effective indication of how dispersed the data is (Taherdoost, 2020).

Variance

The variance measures how distant each value in the data set is from the mean (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to Hair et al. (2013), the variance is occasionally used as an effective measure of how widespread the data is for a distribution. It is calculated “by subtracting the mean from each of the observations in the data set, taking the square of this difference, and dividing the total of these by the number of observations” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 283). As an advantage, every deviation from the mean, irrespective of the direction is treated the same (Jasim, 2021).

Standard Deviation

Standard deviation is calculated by taking the square root of the variance (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), it is a more commonly used measure of dispersion that is used for ratio-scaled and interval data. Once calculated, this measure suggests an index of the variability in the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, measures of dispersion are used to assess the degree to which UKZN students' perceptions differ as a result of the seven dimensions of the study (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Furthermore, the measures of central tendency and dispersion are valuable for providing the researcher with a deeper understanding of the data after it has been analysed (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Sharma, 2019).

3.12.2 Inferential statistics

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), inferential statistics can be described as providing perceptions or inferences on the sample population, from which the researcher can draw conclusions. Inferential statistics also provide generalisability to the population (Hair et al., 2013). The following inferential statistics are commonly used:

3.12.2.1 Pearson correlation

The Pearson Correlation matrix (or r) serves to measure how well variables are related (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The Pearson Correlation matrix indicates the strength, significance and direction of the different relationships between the variables (Sharma, 2019). This measure ranges from -1 to 1. A value of 0.6 indicates a weak relationship and a value above 0.6 indicates a good or strong relationship between the variables (Lund Research, 2016). A negative value indicates a negative relationship between the variables, meaning that if the independent variable increases the dependent variable will decrease (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Furthermore, du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) state that a positive value indicates a positive

relationship between the variables, meaning that when the independent variable increases the dependent variable will also increase. A Pearson's correlation value of 0, means that there is no relationship between the variables (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

For the purpose of this study, a chi-square correlation analysis was used to uncover the relationships between the key dimensions of the study (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic).

3.12.2.2 T-test

T-tests are statistical tests that are used to determine the mean difference between two samples (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). They are also used to compare the means of two groups (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). When the two groups that are being compared are independent of each other, an independent T-test can be used (Bevans, 2023). Whereas, when the two groups that are being compared are dependent on each other, a paired T-test can be used (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

3.12.2.3 Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a statistical tool that tests the hypothesis of two means or more population differences (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In addition, Sekaran and Bougie (2016) explain that the analysis of variance measures the significance of two or more factors by comparing means at different levels of factors. ANOVA is a preferred method, rather than using multiple T-tests, to be used in a research study when there are multiple samples (Gabrenya, 2013; Sharma, 2019).

In relation to this study, ANOVA was used to determine if there is a significant difference between the dimensions of the study (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase

decisions and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic) and the biographical variables, namely, education level, college, age and race.

3.12.2.4 Mann-Whitney U-test

The Mann-Whitney U-test can be described as a statistical test that is used to make comparisons between two independent groups, which do not require largely distributed samples (SPSS Community Project, 2019). It tests whether there is a difference in the dependent variable for two independent variables. The test starts from a score of 1 (lowest), ranking all dependent variables accordingly and thereafter, uses the sum of all ranks (groups) to calculate the statistic (Community Project, 2019).

In this study, the Mann-Whitney U-test was used to determine the differences between the perceptions of male and female respondents regarding the key dimensions (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic) of the study.

3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A gatekeeper's letter was obtained before the research for this study was undertaken. Once the study was approved and ethical clearance was obtained, students were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality by means of a Letter of Informed Consent. The questionnaire that was formulated avoided the use of discriminatory, offensive or unacceptable language. This study also ensured that student participation was voluntary and that students were aware that they might withdraw at any time. The raw data on the excel spreadsheet was stored on a USB and will be destroyed after five years of completion of this study. Objectivity was maintained in the analyses of data as well as the discussions throughout the research.

3.14 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided insight into the research process and how data is gathered and analysed. An understanding of the data and statistical analysis used is important. A quantitative method was used to collect and analyse information in relation to the population size for this study. The researcher chose to make use of a non-probability sampling design, with the technique of convenience sampling. Chapter Four will consist of the presentation and analysis of results.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The outcomes of this research study are reported in this chapter. The researcher made use of both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the findings. Graphical, tabular, and narrative formats are all used to present the data. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27 was used to process the data collected from the sample after being entered into Microsoft Excel, Version 2016. Pie charts and tables were used to show the demographic data of respondents. Descriptive statistics comprised the mean, median, mode and frequency distribution.

The following data are presented in accordance with the research objectives and related research questions addressed in this chapter:

4.1.1 To determine the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' perceptions of brands. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study include:

4.1.1.1 To determine if influencer marketing has an effect on UKZN students' attitudes towards brands.

4.1.1.2 To uncover UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality).

4.1.1.3 To investigate the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour.

4.1.2. To ascertain the impact that influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) has on UKZN students' purchasing decisions.

4.1.3. To investigate the effect that influencer marketing has on the purchasing behaviour of UKZN students. In this regard, the sub-questions of the study include:

4.1.3.1. To determine if brand communication content of influencers on social media influenced UKZN students' purchase decisions.

- 4.1.3.2. To uncover the influence that electronic word of mouth through content sharing on social media has on the purchase decisions of UKZN students.
- 4.1.3.3. To ascertain UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online brand content of influencers on purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.1.4. To formulate creative influencer marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Data from the questionnaires were analysed by the researcher, using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

4.2.1 Descriptive statistics

4.2.1.1 Biographical details of respondents

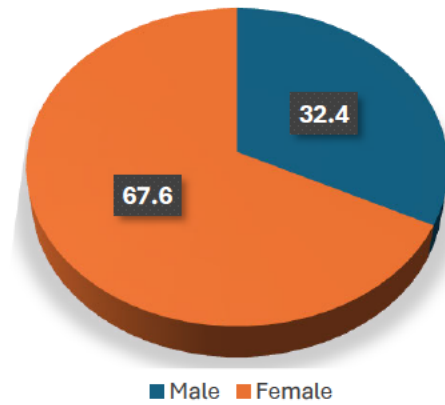
The minimum sample for this study was calculated to be 375 subjects and the researcher received 306 correctly completed questionnaires. Due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic on this study, questionnaires were administered electronically. Owing to this limitation, there was a low response rate. The biographical details of the 306 respondents are outlined in Table 4.1. In this study, frequencies and percentages have been used to outline the biographical variables. It is important to analyse the biographical variables to determine if there are significant differences in the perceptions and purchase behaviour of UKZN students, in accordance with their varied demographics (gender, age, race, educational level and college) in relation to each dimension of the study (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Table 4.1: Frequency Distribution of Biographical Variables

		n	%
Gender	Male	99	32,4%
	Female	207	67,6%
	Total	306	100%
Age	18-21	209	68,3%
	22-25	81	26,5%
	26-29	8	2,6%
	30-33	6	2%
	34-37	1	0,3%
	38 and over	1	0,3%
	Total	306	100%
Race	African	185	60,5%
	Coloured	17	5,6%
	Indian	93	30,4%
	White	10	3,3%
	Other	1	0,3%
	Total	306	100%
Educational Level	Undergraduate	250	81,7%
	Honours Degree	24	7,8%
	Post-Graduate Diploma	13	4,2%
	Master's Degree	16	5,2%
	Doctoral Degree	3	1%
	Total	306	100%
College	College of Law and Management Studies	83	27,1%
	College of Humanities	3	1%
	College of Health Sciences	103	33,7%
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	117	38,2%
	Total	306	100%

The biographical factors comprised gender, age, race, level of education and college, as evident in Table 4.1. The gender distribution of the 306 survey respondents who participated in this study, is depicted in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Composition of Sample: Gender



As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the majority of the respondents were females (67.6%) whereas, 32.4% of the respondents were male. Figure 4.2 provides a graphical depiction of the percentages of the 306 respondents from the various age categories of the study.

Figure 4.2: Composition of Sample: Age

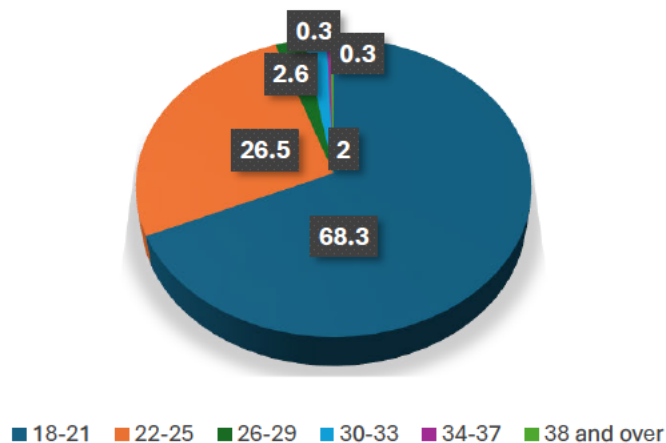
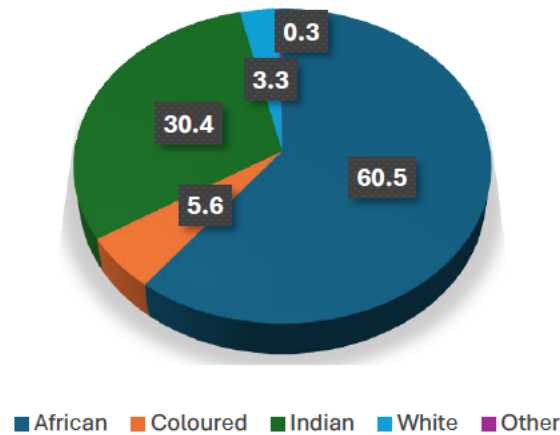


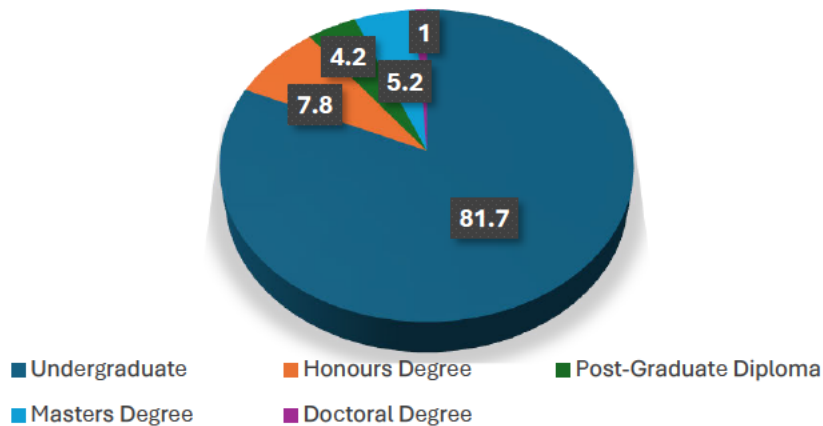
Figure 4.2 illustrates that the highest proportions of respondents were from the 18 to 21 year (68.3%) age category, followed by the 22 to 25 year (26.5%) age group category. Respondents between the ages of 26 to 29 years constituted 2.6% of the sample, while those in the 30 to 33 year age category had a portion of 2% of the sample. Figure 4.3 depicts a graphical representation of the percentages of respondents according to race groups.

Figure 4.3: Composition of Sample: Race



The sample for this study included respondents from four racial groups, as shown in Figure 4.3. The majority of the respondents (60.5%) were Africans, followed by Indian respondents (30.4%) and Coloured respondents (5.6%). The lowest proportion of respondents (3.3%) belonged to the White racial group. A graphical representation of the educational level is illustrated in Figure 4.4.

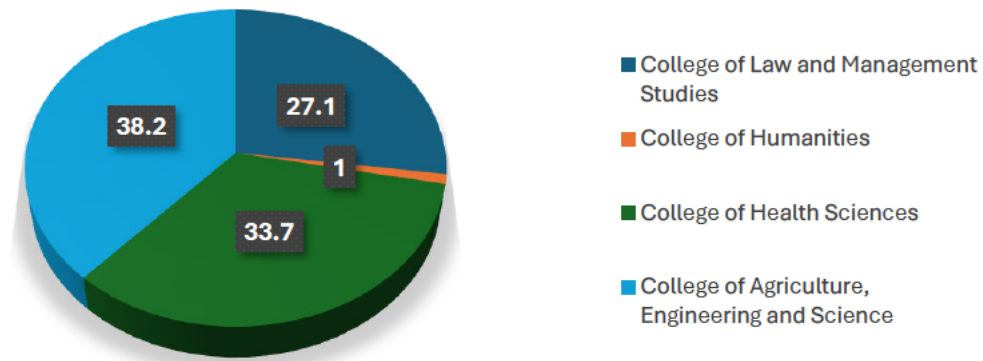
Figure 4.4: Composition of Sample: Educational Level



As seen in Figure 4.4, the results indicated that the majority (81.7%) of the respondents were registered for an undergraduate degree. Respondents from the Honours degree category accounted for 7.8% of the sample, while 5.2% of students were enrolled for a Master's Degree. More so, 4.2% of the students in the sample were registered for a Postgraduate Diploma and a meagre 1% of the students were pursuing their Doctoral degree qualifications. A graphic

representation of the colleges that the UKZN students who took part in this study belong to is shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Composition of Sample: College



According to Figure 4.5, 38.2% of the study participants were enrolled in the College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science and 33.7% of the sample was comprised of respondents who were students at the College of Health Sciences. The findings also showed that 27.1% of the respondents were from the College of Law and Management Studies and only 1% from College of Humanities.

4.2.1.2 Importance that UKZN students attach to key dimensions of the study

Descriptive statistics will be used to present the findings in relation to the main study dimensions. Using a 1-5 point Likert scale, UKZN students were asked to assess their perceptions of the various important study dimensions. The higher the mean score, the more positively the dimension is viewed (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics: Key Dimensions of the Study

Key Dimensions of the Study	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	1,000	5,000	3,925	0,661
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	1,000	5,000	3,893	0,566
Impact of IM on brand switching	1,000	5,000	3,669	0,713
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	1,000	5,000	3,963	0,521
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	1,000	5,000	3,604	0,850
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	1,000	5,000	3,832	0,747
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	1,000	5,000	3,534	0,847

Table 4.2. indicates that UKZN students attach varying degrees of importance to the key dimensions of the study which, in descending level of mean score values are:

- ❖ Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions (Mean = 3,963)
- ❖ Effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands (Mean = 3,925)
- ❖ Effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity (Mean = 3,893)
- ❖ Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions (Mean = 3,832)
- ❖ Impact of influencer marketing on brand switching (Mean = 3,669)
- ❖ Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions (Mean = 3,604)

- ❖ Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mean = 3,534)

As per Table 4.2, University of KwaZulu-Natal students attach the greatest level of importance to the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions (Mean = 3,963) and the least level of importance to the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mean = 3,534). Subsequently, frequency analyses were conducted, to assess how UKZN students viewed each dimension. Frequency analyses comprised the assessment of the frequency distribution of the results for each of the scale items in order to determine if the data was normally distributed or not.

In terms of the construction of the questionnaire of this study, each of the objectives and sub-objectives of the study, pertaining to the Likert Scale items in Section B are clustered as follows:

Key Dimensions

- 1) Effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands : Statements B1–B5
- 2) Effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity : Statements B6–B19
- 3) Impact of influencer marketing on brand switching : Statements B20–B23
- 4) Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions : Statements B24–B41
- 5) Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions : Statements B42–B47
- 6) Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions : Statements B48–B52

7) Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic : Statements B53–B58

Table 4.3 displays the frequency distribution of the Likert Scale items (Statements B1–B5), relating to the first dimension of the study, which is to determine if influencer marketing has an impact on students' attitudes towards brands.

Key dimensions 1 to 3 relate to the first research objective of the study which investigates the impact of influence influencer marketing on UKZN students' perceptions of brands. Key dimension 4 relates to the second research objective of the study which explores the impact of influencer credibility on UKZN students' purchase decisions. Key dimensions 5 to 7 relate to the third research objective of the study which investigates the effect that influencer marketing has on purchase behaviour of UKZN students.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 1

B1 - I strongly believe that the content that influencers post about brands on social media will create positive consumer attitudes towards these brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	12	3,9
Disagree	11	3,6
Neither agree nor disagree	25	8,2
Agree	150	49
Strongly Agree	108	35,3
Total	306	100
B2 - I believe that influencers are able to influence consumers' attitudes towards brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	7	2,3
Disagree	5	1,6
Neither agree nor disagree	10	3,3
Agree	143	46,7
Strongly Agree	141	46,1
Total	306	100

Table 4.3 (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 1

B3 - I trust the opinion of the influencers that I follow on social media and am likely to develop a favourable attitude towards brands that they promote.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	14	4,6
Disagree	52	17
Neither agree nor disagree	80	26,1
Agree	101	33
Strongly Agree	59	19,3
Total	306	100
B4 - I am likely to form a positive attitude towards products or brands after viewing the content posted by the influencer about the products or brands on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	6	2
Disagree	30	9,8
Neither agree nor disagree	64	20,9
Agree	153	50
Strongly Agree	53	17,3
Total	306	100
B5 - I often remember products or brands based on the influencer marketing content that is posted or shared on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	4	1,3
Disagree	16	5,2
Neither agree nor disagree	33	10,8
Agree	160	52,3
Strongly Agree	93	30,4
Total	306	100

In terms of respondents' perceptions of the dimension pertaining to *effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands*, as shown in Table 4.3, the majority of the respondents (84.3%) assert that the content that influencers post about brands on social media will create positive consumer attitudes towards these brands. In addition, 92.8% of respondents believe that influencers are able to influence consumers' attitudes towards brands. Furthermore, the results of this study reveal that 52.3% of respondents trust the opinion of the influencers that they follow on social media and are likely to develop a favourable attitude towards brands that they promote. Table 4.3 also reflected that 67.3% of respondents are likely to form a positive attitude towards products or brands after viewing the content posted by the influencer about the products or brands on social media. Lastly, the majority (82.7%) of respondents often

remember products or brands based on the influencer marketing content that is posted or shared on social media.

Table 4.4 displays the frequency distribution of the Likert Scale items (Statements B6 – B19), relating to the second dimension of the study, which is to uncover whether or not influencer marketing has an effect on creating brand equity for UKZN students.

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2

B6 - I believe that marketers need to use influencer marketing as it assists in creating awareness of their brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	4	1,3
Neither agree nor disagree	35	11,4
Agree	145	47,4
Strongly Agree	117	38,2
Total	306	100
B7 - I feel that influencer marketing content on social media will assist consumers in recalling brand names.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	1
Disagree	10	3,3
Neither agree nor disagree	30	9,8
Agree	161	52,6
Strongly Agree	102	33,3
Total	306	100
B8 - I easily recall the brands that an influencer promotes whenever I see or hear about that influencer on television, in the news or on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	13	4,2
Neither agree nor disagree	38	12,4
Agree	162	52,9
Strongly Agree	88	28,8
Total	306	100

Table 4.4: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2

B9 - I believe that influencers on social media help to increase awareness of brands that they promote.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	1
Disagree	2	0,7
Neither agree nor disagree	23	7,5
Agree	143	46,7
Strongly Agree	135	44,1
Total	306	100
B10 - I have become familiar with an unknown brand after viewing content about that brand from the influencers that I follow on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	2,6
Disagree	19	6,2
Neither agree nor disagree	33	10,8
Agree	148	48,4
Strongly Agree	98	32
Total	306	100
B11 - I believe that influencer marketing content on social media assists consumers in gaining more knowledge about products and brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	11	3,6
Neither agree nor disagree	33	10,8
Agree	157	51,3
Strongly Agree	100	32,7
Total	306	100
B12 - I believe that influencer marketing enables companies to enhance the image of their brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	9	2,9
Neither agree nor disagree	31	10,1
Agree	144	47,1
Strongly Agree	117	38,2
Total	306	100

Table 4.4: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2

B13 - I am of the opinion that products that are promoted via influencer marketing portray a strong brand image.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	25	8,2
Neither agree nor disagree	66	21,6
Agree	122	39,9
Strongly Agree	88	28,8
Total	306	100
B14 - I am loyal to products or brands that I receive information about via influencer marketing content on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	20	6,5
Disagree	69	22,5
Neither agree nor disagree	104	34
Agree	67	21,9
Strongly Agree	46	15
Total	306	100
B15 - I am satisfied with using the brands that my favourite influencers recommend on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	12	3,9
Disagree	43	14,1
Neither agree nor disagree	88	28,8
Agree	109	35,6
Strongly Agree	54	17,6
Total	306	100
B16 - I believe that it is crucial for companies to use influencer marketing in order to build brand loyalty.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	6	2
Disagree	29	9,5
Neither agree nor disagree	67	21,9
Agree	129	42,2
Strongly Agree	75	24,5
Total	306	100

Table 4.4: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 2

B17 - I feel that companies can enhance consumers' perceptions of brand quality by using influencer marketing.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	18	5,9
Neither agree nor disagree	33	10,8
Agree	170	55,6
Strongly Agree	80	26,1
Total	306	100
B18 - I believe that the brands that I have purchased as a result of influencer marketing initiatives are of a good quality.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	2,6
Disagree	31	10,1
Neither agree nor disagree	91	29,7
Agree	120	39,2
Strongly Agree	56	18,3
Total	306	100
B19 - I feel that the influencer marketing content that I view on social media assists me in assessing the quality of products.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	2,6
Disagree	42	13,7
Neither agree nor disagree	66	21,6
Agree	124	40,5
Strongly Agree	66	21,6
Total	306	100

In terms of the *effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity*, 85.6% of respondents believe that influencer marketing can be a useful tool for marketers to create brand awareness. In addition, a majority of respondents (85.9%) feel that influencer marketing content on social media will assist consumers in recalling brand names. Table 4.4 also reflects that 81.7% of the respondents can easily recall the brands that an influencer promotes whenever they see or hear about that influencer on television, in the news or on social media. The results of the study also indicate that the majority of respondents (90.8%) believe that influencers on social media help to increase awareness of brands that they promote, whereas 80.4% of respondents affirm that they have become familiar with an unknown brand after viewing content about that brand from the influencers that they follow on social media. In addition, the results in Table 4.4 reveal that 84% of respondents believe that influencer marketing content on social media assists consumers in gaining additional knowledge about products and brands,

whereas 85.3% of respondents believe that influencer marketing enables companies to enhance the image of their brands. Furthermore, while 68.7% are of the opinion that products that are promoted via influencer marketing portray a strong brand image, only 36.9% of consumers remain loyal to products or brands that they receive information about via influencer marketing content on social media. In addition, this study found that 53.2% of respondents are satisfied with using the brands that their favourite influencers recommend on social media, while 66.7% of respondents believe that it is crucial for companies to use influencer marketing in order to build brand loyalty. A majority of respondents (81.7%) also believed that companies can enhance consumers' perceptions of brand quality by using influencer marketing and more than half (57.5%) of the respondents believe that the brands that they have purchased as a result of influencer marketing initiatives are of good quality. Table 4.4, also displayed that 62.1% respondents feel that the influencer marketing content that they view on social media assists them in assessing the quality of products.

Table 4.5 displays the frequency distribution of the Likert Scale items (Statements B20 – B23), relating to the third dimension of the study, which is to determine whether or not influencer marketing has an impact on brand switching for UKZN students.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 3

B20 - I am likely to try a new product or brand that is recommended by influencers that I follow on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	12	3,9
Disagree	36	11,8
Neither agree nor disagree	53	17,3
Agree	140	45,8
Strongly Agree	65	21,2
Total	306	100
B21 - I have switched to a different brand after viewing influencer marketing content on social media that was posted by the influencers that I follow.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	18	5,9
Disagree	75	24,5
Neither agree nor disagree	74	24,2
Agree	93	30,4
Strongly Agree	46	15,0
Total	306	100,0

Table 4.5 (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 3

B22 - I feel that customers will not switch between brands if they are satisfied by the quality of the brands that are promoted by influencers.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	6	2
Disagree	30	9,8
Neither agree nor disagree	61	19,9
Agree	118	38,6
Strongly Agree	91	29,7
Total	306	100
B23 - I believe that companies need to use influencer marketing in order to encourage consumers to switch to their brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	19	6,2
Neither agree nor disagree	57	18,6
Agree	144	47,1
Strongly Agree	81	26,5
Total	306	100

With regard to the *impact of influencer marketing on brand switching*, the majority (67%) of the respondents are likely to try a new product or brand that is recommended by influencers that they follow on social media, whereas less than half (45.4%) of respondents have switched to a different brand after viewing influencer marketing content on social media that was posted by the influencers that they follow. In addition, 68.3% of respondents feel that customers will not switch between brands if they are satisfied by the quality of the brands that are promoted by influencers. This study also revealed that the majority (73.6%) of respondents believe that companies need to use influencer marketing in order to encourage consumers to switch to their brands.

Table 4.6 displays the frequency distribution of the Likert Scale items (Statements B24 – B41), relating to the fourth dimension of the study, which is to determine whether or not influencer credibility impacts students' purchase decisions.

Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4

B24 - I feel that the credibility of influencers impacts my decision to purchase products or brands that they promote.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	11	3,6
Disagree	25	8,2
Neither agree nor disagree	46	15
Agree	118	38,6
Strongly Agree	106	34,6
Total	306	100
B25 - I am likely to purchase a new or unfamiliar brand if a credible influencer posts content about the brand on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	19	6,2
Disagree	46	15
Neither agree nor disagree	69	22,5
Agree	104	34
Strongly Agree	68	22,2
Total	306	100
B26 - I am likely to stop following an influencer who engages in negative behaviour.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	13	4,2
Disagree	17	5,6
Neither agree nor disagree	27	8,8
Agree	88	28,8
Strongly Agree	161	52,6
Total	306	100
B27 - I believe that the attractiveness of the influencer impacts my purchase decisions of brands that they promote on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	23	7,5
Disagree	48	15,7
Neither agree nor disagree	55	18
Agree	104	34
Strongly Agree	76	24,8
Total	306	100

Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4

B28 - I feel that companies will be able to make their brands more appealing to consumers by using attractive influencers.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	10	3,3
Disagree	38	12,4
Neither agree nor disagree	58	19
Agree	118	38,6
Strongly Agree	82	26,8
Total	306	100
B29 - I am of the opinion that influencer reviews are more trustworthy than company-controlled reviews.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	25	8,2
Disagree	38	12,4
Neither agree nor disagree	83	27,1
Agree	98	32
Strongly Agree	62	20,3
Total	306	100
B30 - I believe that the honesty and integrity of influencers are crucial in influencing consumers' purchase decisions.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	2,6
Disagree	11	3,6
Neither agree nor disagree	32	10,5
Agree	115	37,6
Strongly Agree	140	45,8
Total	306	100
B31 - I believe that the negative behaviour of an influencer will alter my perceptions of the products or brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	13	4,2
Disagree	33	10,8
Neither agree nor disagree	39	12,7
Agree	104	34
Strongly Agree	117	38,2
Total	306	100

Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4

B32 - I am likely to base my purchase decisions on the competency and expertise of the influencer in terms of the product or brand.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	12	3,9
Disagree	23	7,5
Neither agree nor disagree	72	23,5
Agree	124	40,5
Strongly Agree	75	24,5
Total	306	100
B33 - I feel that an influencer who has a high level of expertise in the product category will be a credible source of brand information.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	6	2
Disagree	6	2
Neither agree nor disagree	36	11,8
Agree	141	46,1
Strongly Agree	117	38,2
Total	306	100
B34 - I believe that influencers who have first-hand usage experience of brands are more likely to enhance their credibility and consumer attitudes towards brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	7	2,3
Disagree	10	3,3
Neither agree nor disagree	34	11,1
Agree	156	51
Strongly Agree	99	32,4
Total	306	100
B35 - The degree of familiarity of the influencer has a positive impact on my purchase decisions.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	4	1,3
Disagree	14	4,6
Neither agree nor disagree	52	17
Agree	151	49,3
Strongly Agree	85	27,8
Total	306	100

Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4

B36 - I am likely to follow influencers who are similar to me in terms of lifestyle and character traits.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	1
Disagree	23	7,5
Neither agree nor disagree	33	10,8
Agree	139	45,4
Strongly Agree	108	35,3
Total	306	100
B37 - I believe that influencers who create an emotional bond through similarity will be better able to persuade consumers to purchase the brands that they promote.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	1
Disagree	12	3,9
Neither agree nor disagree	34	11,1
Agree	152	49,7
Strongly Agree	105	34,3
Total	306	100
B38 - I believe that popular influencers with large social media followings are likely to persuade consumers to purchase a particular brand.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	1	0,3
Disagree	8	2,6
Neither agree nor disagree	28	9,2
Agree	138	45,1
Strongly Agree	131	42,8
Total	306	100
B39 - I am of the opinion that the influencer's likeability will add value to the brand that he/she promotes.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	2	0,7
Disagree	4	1,3
Neither agree nor disagree	38	12,4
Agree	139	45,4
Strongly Agree	123	40,2
Total	306	100

Table 4.6: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 4

B40 - I feel that companies can rely on popular influencers to draw attention to their brands in a cluttered environment.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree	16	5,2
Neither agree nor disagree	41	13,4
Agree	128	41,8
Strongly Agree	121	39,5
Total	306	100
B41 - I believe that influencer popularity favourably influences consumers' feelings, brand attitudes and purchase behaviour.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	2	0,7
Disagree	13	4,2
Neither agree nor disagree	38	12,4
Agree	162	52,9
Strongly Agree	91	29,7
Total	306	100

In terms of the fourth dimension of the study, the *impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions*, a majority of respondents (73.2%) feel that the credibility of influencers impact their purchase decisions of products or brands that the influencers promote, whereas more than half of the respondents (56.2%) assert that they are likely to purchase a new or unfamiliar brand if a credible influencer posts content about the brand on social media. Moreover, 81.4% of the respondents are likely to stop following an influencer who engages in negative behaviour and 58.8% of respondents believe that the attractiveness of the influencer impacts purchase decisions of brands that they promote on social media. The results of the study further indicate that 65.4% of the respondents feel that companies that use attractive influencers will be able to make their brands more appealing to consumers, whereas more than half of the respondents (52.3%) feel that influencer reviews are more trustworthy than company-controlled reviews. Furthermore, a majority of respondents (83.4%), believe that the honesty and integrity of influencers are crucial in influencing consumers' purchase decisions, while 72.2% of respondents believe that the negative behaviour of an influencer will alter their perceptions of the products or brands. According to the results of the study, 65% of respondents feel that they are likely to base their purchase decisions on the competency and expertise of the influencer in terms of the product or brand. The results of the study further indicate that 84.3% of respondents, feel that an influencer who has a high level of expertise in the product category will be a credible source of brand information, whereas 83.4% of the respondents believe that

influencers who have first-hand usage experience of brands are more likely to enhance their credibility and consumer attitudes towards brands. The results of the study further indicate that a majority of respondents (77.1%), assert that the degree of familiarity of the influencer has a positive impact on their purchase decisions, while 80.7% of respondents are likely to follow influencers who are similar to them in terms of lifestyle and character traits. In addition, 84% of the respondents believe that influencers who create an emotional bond through similarity will be better able to persuade consumers to purchase the brands that they promote, while 87.9% of respondents believe that popular influencers with large social media followings are likely to persuade consumers to purchase a particular brand.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents (85.6%) are of the opinion that the influencer’s likeability will add value to the brand that he/she promotes, while 81.3% of respondents feel that companies can rely on popular influencers to draw attention to their brands in a cluttered environment. The results of the study further indicate 82.6% of the respondents believe that influencer popularity favourably influences consumers’ feelings, brand attitudes and purchase behaviour.

Table 4.7 displays the frequency distribution of the Likert Scale items (Statements B42 – B47), relating to the fifth dimension of the study, which is to determine whether or not influencer brand communication content impacts students’ purchase decisions.

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 5

B42 - Influencer marketing content on social media allows me to evaluate different products or brands before making my purchase decisions.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	6	2
Disagree	10	3,3
Neither agree nor disagree	73	23,9
Agree	133	43,5
Strongly Agree	84	27,5
Total	306	100

Table 4.7: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 5

B43 - I am likely to purchase products or brands after viewing influencer marketing content on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	9	2,9
Disagree	43	14,1
Neither agree nor disagree	82	26,8
Agree	108	35,3
Strongly Agree	64	20,9
Total	306	100
B44 - I feel that I get value-for-money whenever I purchase products or brands that are recommended by influencers.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	12	3,9
Disagree	50	16,3
Neither agree nor disagree	104	34
Agree	88	28,8
Strongly Agree	52	17
Total	306	100
B45 - I have purchased a product or brand due to the persuasiveness of the influencer marketing content that I had received about that product or brand.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	21	6,9
Disagree	47	15,4
Neither agree nor disagree	51	16,7
Agree	124	40,5
Strongly Agree	63	20,6
Total	306	100
B46 - I believe that influencer marketing saves me time and money in comparing alternative brands of products.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	20	6,5
Disagree	38	12,4
Neither agree nor disagree	63	20,6
Agree	113	36,9
Strongly Agree	72	23,5
Total	306	100

Table 4.7: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 5

B47 - An influencer's behaviour has directly influenced my purchase decision to buy the brand that he/she promotes.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	16	5,2
Disagree	45	14,7
Neither agree nor disagree	49	16
Agree	118	38,6
Strongly Agree	78	25,5
Total	306	100

With regard to the *effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions*, the majority (71%) of the respondents admit that influencer marketing content on social media allows them to evaluate different products or brands before making their purchase decisions, while more than half of the respondents (56.2%) are likely to purchase products or brands after viewing influencer marketing content on social media. However, less than half (45.8%) of respondents feel that they get value for money whenever they purchase products or brands that are recommended by influencers. Furthermore, 61.1% of the respondents in this study affirm that they have purchased a product or brand due to the persuasiveness of the influencer marketing content that they had received about that product or brand, while 60.4% of the respondents believe that influencer marketing saves them time and money in comparing alternative brands of products. In addition, 64.1% of the respondents affirm that an influencer's behaviour has directly influenced their purchase decision to buy the brand that he/she promotes.

Table 4.8 displays the frequency distribution of the Likert Scale items (Statements B48 – B52), relating to the sixth dimension of the study, which is to discover the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions.

Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 6

B48 - I inform my family and friends about the products or brands that are promoted by the influencers that I follow on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	16	5,2
Disagree	43	14,1
Neither agree nor disagree	60	19,6
Agree	109	35,6
Strongly Agree	78	25,5
Total	306	100
B49 - I became familiar with unknown products or brands after family and friends shared influencer marketing content about these products or brands on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	9	2,9
Disagree	26	8,5
Neither agree nor disagree	49	16
Agree	149	48,7
Strongly Agree	73	23,9
Total	306	100
B50 - I have made purchases of products and brands after receiving influencer marketing content from family and friends.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	14	4,6
Disagree	53	17,3
Neither agree nor disagree	51	16,7
Agree	123	40,2
Strongly Agree	65	21,2
Total	306	100
B51 - I believe that the sharing of influencer marketing content on social media will encourage consumers to purchase products or brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	1
Disagree	8	2,6
Neither agree nor disagree	37	12,1
Agree	158	51,6
Strongly Agree	100	32,7
Total	306	100

Table 4.8: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 6

B52 - I am likely to gain more knowledge about products or brands after viewing content that is posted by the influencers on social media.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	5	1,6
Disagree	19	6,2
Neither agree nor disagree	31	10,1
Agree	157	51,3
Strongly Agree	94	30,7
Total	306	100

Regarding the *influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions*, 61.1% of respondents affirm that they inform their family and friends about the products or brands that are promoted by the influencers that they follow on social media. The results of the study further indicate that 72.6% of the respondents affirm that they became familiar with unknown products or brands after family and friends shared influencer marketing content about these products or brands on social media, whereas 61.4% of respondents attest to having made purchases of products and brands after receiving influencer marketing content from family and friends. In addition, the majority (84.3%) of respondents believe that the sharing of influencer marketing content on social media will encourage consumers to purchase products or brands, while 82 % of the respondents are likely to gain more knowledge about products or brands after viewing content that is posted by the influencers on social media.

Table 4.9 displays the frequency distribution of the Likert Scale items (Statements B53 – B58), relating to the seventh dimension of the study, which is to uncover the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 7

B53 - I feel that online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic was very informative.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	4	1,3
Disagree	33	10,8
Neither agree nor disagree	71	23,2
Agree	117	38,2
Strongly Agree	81	26,5
Total	306	100

Table 4.9: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 7

B54 - I relied upon influencer marketing content posted on social media to learn more about the pandemic.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	28	9,2
Disagree	61	19,9
Neither agree nor disagree	71	23,2
Agree	88	28,8
Strongly Agree	58	19
Total	306	100
B55 - I trusted the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	27	8,8
Disagree	54	17,6
Neither agree nor disagree	102	33,3
Agree	66	21,6
Strongly Agree	57	18,6
Total	306	100
B56 - I have purchased brands after viewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	22	7,2
Disagree	58	19
Neither agree nor disagree	70	22,9
Agree	107	35
Strongly Agree	49	16
Total	306	100
B57 - I feel that the companies that relied upon influencer marketing on digital platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic were better able to market their products or brands.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	9	2,9
Disagree	20	6,5
Neither agree nor disagree	47	15,4
Agree	152	49,7
Strongly Agree	78	25,5
Total	306	100

Table 4.9: (Continued): Descriptive Statistics: Frequency Distribution of the Scale Items – Dimension 7

B58 - I was able to develop a favourable attitude towards brands after reviewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic.		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	10	3,3
Disagree	36	11,8
Neither agree nor disagree	68	22,2
Agree	117	38,2
Strongly Agree	75	24,5
Total	306	100

In terms of the *effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic*, 64.7% of respondents felt that online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic was very informative. The results of the study also reveal less than half (47.8%) of respondents attest that they relied upon influencer marketing content posted on social media to learn more about the pandemic, whereas 40.2% affirm that they trusted the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 51% of respondents attest that they have purchased brands after viewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic, while 75.2% of the respondents feel that the companies that relied upon influencer marketing on digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic were better able to market their products or brands. The majority (62.7%) of the respondents also attest that they were able to develop a favourable attitude towards brands after reviewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2.2 Inferential statistics

4.2.2.1 UKZN student perceptions of key dimension of the study

Hypothesis 1:

There exist significant intercorrelations amongst the key dimensions (effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, and effectiveness of influencer content on students'

purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic) of the study relating to UKZN students, respectively (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10: Correlation: Key Dimensions of the Study

		Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	Impact of IM on brand switching	Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	R	1						
	P							
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	R	0.633**	1					
	P	0,000						
Impact of IM on brand switching	R	0.519**	0.729**	1				
	P	0,000	0,000					
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	R	0.497**	0.703**	0.683**	1			
	P	0,000	0,000	0,000				
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	R	0.535**	0.718**	0.692**	0.677**	1		
	P	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000			
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	R	0.519**	0.703**	0.609**	0.669**	0.777**	1	
	P	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000		
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	R	0.462**	0.662**	0.585**	0.598**	0.703**	0.650**	1
	P	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	
** p < 0.01								
*p < 0.05								

The results shown in Table 4.10 show that all the key dimensions are positively correlated to each other. These results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic,

respectively, at the 1% level of significance. The implications of the positive, significant relationships are that UKZN students who possess positive attitudes towards brands that are associated with influencer marketing initiatives are more inclined to purchase these brands, encourage peers, friends and family to purchase these brands and are likely to become patrons of these brands.

As evident in Table 4.10, there is a significant positive relationship between the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively, at the 1% level of significance. The inference is that content that influencers create and disseminate results in enhanced brand equity for UKZN students and positive reviews online as patrons of these brands.

Table 4.10 indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively, at the 1% level of significance. The implication of the positive, significant relationship is that UKZN students are likely to switch brands in support of competitor brands that influencers endorse, if the influencer is credible and brand communication is effective.

As indicated in Table 4.10, there is a significant positive relationship between the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic respectively, at the 1% level of significance. The implication of the positive, significant relationship is that, an influencer's credibility will increase UKZN students purchases, if influencer content and brand communication is effective.

Table 4.10 reflects that there is a significant positive relationship between the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively, at the 1% level of significance. The inference is that influencer brand communication and eWOM highly impacted consumers purchases decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.10 indicates that, at a 1% level of significance, there is a significant positive relationship between the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The implication of the positive, significant relationship is that, eWOM was a very successful tool when used effectively by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the findings in Table 4.10, there are moderate relationships between the following constructs:

- Impact of influencer marketing on brand switching and effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.692$).
- Impact of influencer marketing on brand switching and impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.692$).
- Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions and Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.677$).
- Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions and Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.669$).
- Effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic ($r = 0.662$).
- Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic ($r = 0.650$).
- Effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands and effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity ($r = 0.633$).

- Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic ($r = 0.598$).
- Impact of influencer marketing on brand switching and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic ($r = 0.585$).
- Effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands and effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.535$).
- Effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands and impact of influencer marketing on brand switching ($r = 0.519$).
- Effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands and influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.519$).

Furthermore, from the findings in Table 4.10, it is apparent that strong relationships exist between the following constructs:

- Between effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions and influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.777$).
- Effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity and impact of influencer marketing on brand switching ($r = 0.729$).
- Effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity and effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.718$).
- Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic ($r = 0.703$).
- Effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity and impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.703$).
- Effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity and influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions ($r = 0.703$).

From the results in Table 4.10, Hypothesis 1 may be accepted.

4.2.2.2 Key dimensions of the study and biographical variables

Hypothesis 2:

There is a significant difference in the perceptions of UKZN students, varying in biographical profiles (gender, age, race, educational level, and college) regarding each dimension of the study (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic), respectively (Tables 4.11 to 4.20).

Table 4.11: Mann-Whitney U-Test: Key Dimensions of the Study and Gender

Key Dimensions of the Study	Mann-Whitney U	Z	P value
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	8318,500	-2,678	0,007**
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	8513,500	-2,396	0,017*
Impact of IM on brand switching	8369,000	-2,612	0,009**
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	7953,500	-3,169	0,002**
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	8346,500	-2,629	0,009**
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	9328,500	-1,272	0,203
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	8806,000	-1,993	0,046*

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

The results in Table 4.11 indicate that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of male and female students regarding the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, at the 1% level of significance. There is also a significant difference in the perceptions of male and female students regarding the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the 5%

level of significance. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of UKZN students regarding the influence of eWOM on purchase decisions of brands that support causes varying in gender. As per Table 4.11, there is a greater likelihood of differences in perceptions of male and female students regarding how effective influencer marketing content on social media is on encouraging brand switching, enhancing students' attitudes towards brands and influencing purchase decisions.

In order to determine where the significant differences lie, mean analyses were undertaken (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Gender

Key Dimensions of the Study	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	Male	4,067	0,623	99
	Female	3,857	0,669	207
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	Male	4,009	0,571	99
	Female	3,837	0,557	207
Impact of IM on brand switching	Male	3,838	0,661	99
	Female	3,588	0,724	207
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	Male	4,089	0,534	99
	Female	3,903	0,505	207
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	Male	3,778	0,831	99
	Female	3,521	0,849	207
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	Male	3,653	0,932	99
	Female	3,477	0,800	207

Table 4.12 indicates that males are more likely to form positive attitudes towards brands based on influencer marketing than their female counterparts. In addition, males are more inclined to perceive influencer marketing techniques as an effective means of enhancing brand equity than females, whereas males are also more likely to be enticed to make their purchases based on influencer brand communication when compared to female students.

Table 4.13: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and Age

Key Dimensions of the Study	Chi-Square	P-value
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	4,918	0,426
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	12,959	0,024*
Impact of IM on brand switching	11,168	0,048*
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	8,847	0,115
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	10,926	0,050*
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	10,411	0,064
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	14,543	0,013*

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

The results shown in Table 4.13 show that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of UKZN students varying in age regarding the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic at the 5% level of significance. No other significant differences exist.

In order to determine where the significant differences lie, mean analyses were undertaken (Table 4.14).

Table 4.14: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Age

Key Dimensions of the Study	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	18-21	3,856	0,538	209
	22-25	3,974	0,584	81
	26-29	3,661	0,895	8
	30-33	4,500	0,347	6
	34-37	3,000		1
	38 and over	4,000		1
	Total	3,893	0,566	306
Impact of IM on brand switching	18-21	3,610	0,69500	209
	22-25	3,762	0,72014	81
	26-29	3,719	0,91063	8
	30-33	4,458	0,53424	6
	34-37	3,000		1
	38 and over	4,000		1
	Total	3,669	0,71273	306
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	18-21	3,561	0,800	209
	22-25	3,663	0,908	81
	26-29	3,313	1,355	8
	30-33	4,611	0,404	6
	34-37	3,833		1
	38 and over	4,000		1
	Total	3,604	0,850	306
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	18-21	3,513	0,778	209
	22-25	3,558	0,948	81
	26-29	3,250	1,087	8
	30-33	4,611	0,390	6
	34-37	1,500		1
	38 and over	4,000		1
	Total	3,534	0,847	306

Table 4.14 indicates that students that fall into the age category of 30-33 are of the belief that influencer marketing is very effective in enhancing brand equity, as well as have a strong opinion that influencer marketing highly impacts brand switching than the other age groups of respondents. The results in Table 4.14 also reflect that students between the ages of 30-33, are

more inclined towards making purchases based on influencer brand communication content and influencer content posted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, than the other age categories.

Table 4.15: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and Race

Key Dimensions of the Study	Chi-Square	P-value
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	8,665	0,070
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	15,395	0,004**
Impact of IM on brand switching	17,948	0,001**
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	20,712	0,000**
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	19,090	0,001**
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	13,271	0,010*
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	23,704	0,000**

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

As illustrated in Table 4.15, there is a significant difference in the perceptions of students varying in race regarding the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, at 1% and 5% level of significance, respectively. No other significant differences exist.

Mean analyses were conducted in order to assess where the significant differences lie (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Race

Key Dimensions of the Study	Race	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	African	3,806	0,529	185
	Coloured	4,139	0,659	17
	Indian	3,972	0,563	93
	White	4,329	0,777	10
	Other	4,000		1
	Total	3,893	0,566	306
Impact of IM on brand switching	African	3,546	0,641	185
	Coloured	4,044	0,853	17
	Indian	3,788	0,729	93
	White	4,225	1,010	10
	Other	3,500		1
	Total	3,669	0,713	306
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	African	3,867	0,472	185
	Coloured	4,265	0,614	17
	Indian	4,048	0,549	93
	White	4,444	0,459	10
	Other	3,889		1
	Total	3,963	0,521	306
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	African	3,476	0,808	185
	Coloured	4,069	0,909	17
	Indian	3,695	0,830	93
	White	4,300	1,122	10
	Other	4,000		1
	Total	3,604	0,850	306
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	African	3,745	0,698	185
	Coloured	4,212	0,736	17
	Indian	3,890	0,793	93
	White	4,260	0,952	10
	Other	3,800		1
	Total	3,832	0,747	306
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	African	3,366	0,782	185
	Coloured	4,118	0,812	17
	Indian	3,681	0,843	93
	White	4,250	1,161	10
	Other	4,000		1
	Total	3,534	0,847	306

The results in Table 4.16 reveal that White students place greater focus on impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions as compared to the other race groups. The results also show that White students are more receptive to influencer brand communication content that influences students' purchase decisions, followed by the Coloured race group. The results

further reveal that White students place a strong emphasis on the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, as compared to other races.

Table 4.17: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and Educational Level

Key Dimensions of the Study	Chi-Square	P-value
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	10,962	0,027*
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	8,645	0,071
Impact of IM on brand switching	14,614	0,006**
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	19,914	0,001**
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	11,937	0,018*
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	6,188	0,186
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	10,430	0,034*

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

Table 4.17 indicates that there is significant difference in the perceptions of UKZN students varying in educational level regarding the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, at 1% and 5% level of significance, respectively. No other significant differences exist.

In order to assess where the significant differences lie, mean analyses were undertaken (Table 4.18).

Table 4.18: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and Education level

Key Dimensions of the Study	Education level	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	Undergraduate	3,891	0,634	250
	Honours Degree	4,058	0,822	24
	Post-Graduate Diploma	4,108	0,738	13
	Master's degree	4,225	0,623	16
	Doctoral Degree	3,267	0,808	3
	Total	3,925	0,661	306
Impact of IM on brand switching	Undergraduate	3,597	0,689	250
	Honours Degree	3,938	0,771	24
	Post-Graduate Diploma	4,115	0,682	13
	Master's Degree	4,094	0,724	16
	Doctoral Degree	3,333	0,629	3
	Total	3,669	0,713	306
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	Undergraduate	3,912	0,505	250
	Honours Degree	4,167	0,510	24
	Post-Graduate Diploma	4,261	0,466	13
	Master's Degree	4,330	0,449	16
	Doctoral Degree	3,315	0,868	3
	Total	3,963	0,521	306
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	Undergraduate	3,527	0,832	250
	Honours Degree	3,882	0,858	24
	Post-Graduate Diploma	3,910	1,013	13
	Master's Degree	4,146	0,777	16
	Doctoral Degree	3,556	0,419	3
	Total	3,604	0,850	306
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	Undergraduate	3,471	0,818	250
	Honours Degree	3,688	0,889	24
	Post-Graduate Diploma	3,949	0,926	13
	Master's Degree	4,010	1,014	16
	Doctoral Degree	3,278	0,674	3
	Total	3,534	0,847	306

The results in Table 4.18 indicate that UKZN students from the Master’s degree category believe that influencer marketing has a strong impact on attitudes towards brands in comparison to students from the other education level categories. Furthermore, Table 4.18 indicates that UKZN students from the Master’s degree category have a stronger opinion that influencer credibility, influencer brand communication content and influencer content posted online during the COVID-19 pandemic have a strong impact on students’ purchase decisions. In addition, as a result of influencer marketing, Postgraduate Diploma students are also more likely to engage in brand switching in comparison to students from the other education level categories.

Table 4.19: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA: Key Dimensions of the Study and College

Key Dimensions of the Study	Chi-Square	P-value
Effect of IM on students’ attitudes towards brands	11,489	0,009**
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	17,081	0,001**
Impact of IM on brand switching	11,655	0,009**
Impact of influencer credibility on students’ purchase decisions	14,067	0,003**
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students’ purchase decisions	11,043	0,011*
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students’ purchase decisions	11,283	0,010*
Effectiveness of influencer content on students’ purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	10,221	0,017*

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

As outlined in Table 4.19, the results indicate that there is significant difference in the perceptions of UKZN students varying in the colleges these students attend regarding the effect of influencer marketing on students’ attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students’ purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students’ purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students’ purchase decisions, and the effectiveness of influencer content on students’ purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, at 1% and 5% level of significance, respectively.

In order to assess where the significant differences lie, mean analyses were undertaken (Table 4.20).

Table 4.20: Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and College

Key Dimensions of the Study	College	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	College of Law and Management Studies	4,089	0,704	83
	College of Humanities	4,200	0,529	3
	College of Health Sciences	3,868	0,602	103
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	3,851	0,667	117
	Total	3,925	0,661	306
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	College of Law and Management Studies	4,106	0,604	83
	College of Humanities	3,738	0,555	3
	College of Health Sciences	3,784	0,547	103
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	3,841	0,521	117
	Total	3,893	0,566	306
Impact of IM on brand switching	College of Law and Management Studies	3,913	0,727	83
	College of Humanities	3,667	0,629	3
	College of Health Sciences	3,585	0,683	103
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	3,571	0,698	117
	Total	3,669	0,713	306
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	College of Law and Management Studies	4,149	0,533	83
	College of Humanities	3,796	0,570	3
	College of Health Sciences	3,919	0,425	103
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	3,874	0,561	117
	Total	3,963	0,521	306
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	College of Law and Management Studies	3,843	0,902	83
	College of Humanities	3,222	1,512	3
	College of Health Sciences	3,532	0,769	103
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	3,507	0,841	117
	Total	3,604	0,850	306
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	College of Law and Management Studies	4,048	0,806	83
	College of Humanities	3,600	0,872	3
	College of Health Sciences	3,761	0,705	103
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	3,747	0,716	117
	Total	3,832	0,747	306

Table 4.20: (Continued): Mean Analyses: Key Dimensions of the Study and College

Key Dimensions of the Study	College	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	College of Law and Management Studies	3,791	0,937	83
	College of Humanities	3,444	0,918	3
	College of Health Sciences	3,453	0,742	103
	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	3,426	0,839	117
	Total	3,534	0,847	306

The results in Table 4.20 indicate that UKZN students from the College of Law and Management studies, believe that influencer marketing has a strong impact in creating brand equity, as well as are more likely to engage in brand switching as a result of influencer marketing in comparison to students from other colleges. As per the results of this study, influencer credibility, influencer brand communication content and influencer content posted online during the COVID-19 have the greatest influence on purchases for students in the College of Law and Management studies in comparison to students from other colleges. Furthermore, students from the College of Humanities in comparison to students from the other colleges, are of a stronger belief that influencer marketing has a great impact in shaping students' attitudes towards brands.

From the results reflected in Tables 4.11 to 4.20, it is evident that Hypothesis 2 may be partially accepted.

4.3 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As indicated in the research methodology, the sample size for the study was computed using the population-to-sample-size table by Sekaran and Bougie (2013) which generated a sample size of 306 subjects, which thereby confirms the adequacy of the sample. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was computed which, respectively, reflected adequacy (0.930; Approx. Chi-Square = 9025,457) and significance (df = 1653; Sig. = 0.000) as seen in Table 4.21. Statistical analysis of the questionnaire was undertaken to determine the questionnaire's validity and reliability. Therefore, Factor Analysis and Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was tested.

Table 4.21: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0,930
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	9025,457
	Df	1653
	Sig.	0,000

4.3.1 Validity of the questionnaire

Table 4.22: Validity of Questionnaire: Factor Analysis

ITEMS	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B1			0,623				
B2			0,672				
B3	0,537		0,416				
B4	0,439		0,506				
B5	0,332		0,542				
B6			0,524		0,321	0,331	
B7			0,439			0,450	
B8			0,586				
B9			0,498			0,376	
B10	0,312		0,428				
B11						0,669	
B12			0,324		0,464		
B13	0,482				0,409		
B14	0,678						
B15	0,628						0,319
B16					0,559		
B17		0,337			0,550		
B18	0,549				0,383		
B19	0,570						
B20	0,530				0,368		
B21	0,559				0,320		
B22				0,470			
B23	0,426	0,314				0,340	
B24	0,480			0,399			
B25	0,582			0,393			
B26				0,634			
B27	0,320						0,724
Eigenvalue	17,917	3,194	2,283	1,786	1,665	1,499	1,455
% of Total Variance	30,89%	5,51%	3,94%	3,08%	2,87%	2,59%	2,51%

Table 4.22: (Continued): Validity of Questionnaire: Factor Analysis

ITEMS	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B28							0,722
B29	0,568						
B30				0,483			
B31				0,594			
B32	0,466			0,312			
B33		0,548		0,428			
B34		0,575			0,332		
B35	0,358	0,504					
B36		0,444					
B37		0,666					
B38		0,490				0,308	
B39		0,557					0,317
B40		0,620					
B41		0,676					
B42	0,560					0,312	
B43	0,650						
B44	0,687						
B45	0,716						
B46	0,651					0,304	
B47	0,624						
B48	0,690						
B49	0,539	0,373					
B50	0,687						
B51		0,400					
B52	0,388	0,351				0,401	
B53	0,521	0,332					
B54	0,673						
B55	0,706						
B56	0,717						
B57		0,541					
B58	0,714						
Eigenvalue	17,917	3,194	2,283	1,786	1,665	1,499	1,455
% of Total Variance	30,89%	5,51%	3,94%	3,08%	2,87%	2,59%	2,51%

The results in Table 4.22 shows that 22 items load significantly on Factor 1 and account for 30,89% of the total variance. Of the 22 items, six items relate to the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, five items pertain to the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, four items to the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, three items relate to the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, two items to the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, two other items relating to the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, and one item to the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands. Since the majority of items

relate to the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, Factor 1 may therefore be labelled likewise.

As indicated in Table 4.22, eight items load significantly on Factor 2 which accounts for 5.51% of the total variance. Results further indicate that seven of the items relate to the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, and the other one relates to the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since more items relate to the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, Factor 2 can be labelled the same.

Table 4.22 reveals that Factor 3 has 6 items that load significantly and accounts for 3.94% of the total variance. Four items relate to the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, and the other two items to the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity. Since most items relate to the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, Factor 3 can be labelled likewise.

Furthermore, Table 4.22 indicates that two items load significantly on Factor 4 and account for 3.08% of the total variance. All items relate to the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions; hence, Factor 4 can be labelled likewise.

Table 4.22 shows that two items load significantly on Factor 5 and account for 2.87% of the total variance and relate to the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity. Therefore, Factor 5 can be labelled accordingly.

As shown in Table 4.22, one item loads significantly on Factor 6 and accounts for 2.59% of the total variance. More so, this item relates to the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity e. Therefore, Factor 6 will be labelled accordingly.

The results in Table 4.22 show that two items load significantly on Factor 7 and explain up to 2.51% of the total variance. These two items relate to the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions. Factor 7 may therefore be labelled likewise.

From the results obtained in Table 4.22, three factors (Factor 2, Factor 4, and Factor 7) were labelled as the impact of CRM on brand awareness and brand trial. In addition, one factor (Factor 1) was labelled as the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions. Another factor (Factor 1) was labelled as the effectiveness of influencer brand communication

content on students' purchase decisions. More so, one factor (Factor 3) was labelled as the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands. Lastly, one factor (Factor 6) was labelled the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity. Only five key dimensions of the study feature as factors.

4.3.2 Reliability of the questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire was statistically assessed using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (Table 4.23). For the scale to be considered reliable and internally consistent in its measurement the Cronbach Alpha should be above 0.7 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A Cronbach Alpha above 0.6 is acceptable (Pallant, 2013).

Table 4.23: Overall Reliability of the Questionnaire: Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,958	0,958	58

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed to measure the consistency of the results. The results reveal a Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha of 0.958 which demonstrates a strong level of inter-item consistency and reliability (Table 4.23). The reliability for individual dimensions was also computed (Table 4.24).

Table 4.24: Overall Reliability of the Questionnaire: Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha
Effect of IM on students' attitudes towards brands	0,741
Effectiveness of IM in creating brand equity	0,870
Impact of IM on brand switching	0,623
Impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions	0,850
Effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions	0,869
Influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions	0,798
Effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic	0,856

As indicated in Table 4.24, all the constructs of the study are internally consistent in their measurement as all Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.623 to 0.870, thereby, indicating that the reliability per dimension ranges from moderate (impact of influencer marketing on brand switching) to good (effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions, impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, and effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity).

4.4 CONCLUSION

Chapter Four reported on the results of descriptive and inferential statistics and analysed the importance that UKZN students attach to the key dimensions of the study. Additionally, reliability and validity were assessed using Factor Analysis and Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha to test the questionnaire. The SPSS results were presented in tabular and graphical forms for a more elaborative interpretation of the findings. Chapter five will explore and discuss the results of this study in comparison to the various literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five encompasses a discussion of the results of this study, that were presented in Chapter Four. Each objective of the study will be outlined, collectively with a discussion of the outcomes. This chapter displays the importance that UKZN students place on the key dimensions of the study (as per the research objectives and sub-objectives), namely, the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2 UKZN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE KEY DIMENSIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study will be discussed in this section in terms of the relevant objectives and sub-objectives. The first objective aimed to determine the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' perceptions of brands. The first sub-objective of the first objective investigated if influencer marketing has an effect on UKZN students' attitudes towards brands. The second sub-objective focused on ascertaining UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality). The third sub-objective aimed to investigate the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour. Additionally, the second objective aimed to uncover the impact that influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) has on UKZN students' purchasing decisions. The third objective aimed to investigate the effect that influencer marketing has on the purchasing behaviour of UKZN students. In this regard, the first sub-objective aimed to determine if brand communication content of influencers on social media influenced UKZN students' purchase decisions. The second sub-objective aimed to uncover the influence that electronic word of mouth through content sharing on social media has on the purchase decisions of UKZN students. Lastly, the

third sub-objective aimed to ascertain UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online brand content of influencers on purchase decisions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.2.1 The impact of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands

The first objective of the study was to determine the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' perceptions of brands. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study are as follows, to determine if influencer marketing has an effect on UKZN students' attitudes towards brands, to uncover UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality) and to investigate the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' decisions to engage in brand switching behaviour.

5.2.1.1 Students' attitudes

Several aspects of student attitudes were examined in this study. According to the results of this study, the majority of the respondents asserted that the content that influencers post about brands on social media will create positive consumer attitudes towards these brands, as well as a majority of respondents also believe that influencers are able to influence consumers' attitudes towards brands. These results were similar to a study conducted in India, which stated that influencers' posts on social media play a vital role in enhancing consumer attitudes towards brands (Rayasam & Khattri, 2022). In addition, a study based on younger consumers in America stated that influencers play a powerful role on social media in shaping positive brand attitudes (Nafees, Cook & Stoddard, 2020).

Furthermore, the results of this study reveal that more than half of the respondents trust the opinion of the influencers that they follow on social media and are likely to develop a favourable attitude towards brands that they promote. A study based on young consumers in Singapore also reflected that consumers' trust is highly impacted by their trust in the influencer's opinion and this is created through trustworthiness, similarity and attractiveness of the influencer (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

This study also reflected that a majority of respondents are likely to form a positive attitude towards products or brands after viewing the content posted by the influencer about the products or brands on social media. The findings of this study were similar to those of Hu (2021), reflecting that consumers develop positive attitudes about products or brands after

viewing influencer-based content, especially when it was perceived as less manipulative or whereby the influencer had positive ratings. In contrast, a study based on Generation C found that consumers' attitudes toward products and brands are more effectively influenced by viewing content on traditional media such as newspapers or television (Grootveld, 2018). According to Grootveld (2018), Generation C can be defined as consumers that are specifically apt for creativity, connection, curation and community. It is therefore based on a consumer's mindset and not on a specific age group or demographic (Grootveld, 2018).

Last, the majority of the respondents of this study often remember products or brands based on the influencer marketing content that is posted or shared on social media. A study conducted in Japan aligned with these findings and also reflected that 90% of consumers bought products or a certain brand as a result of remembering the influencer's posts based on those products or brands (Zhang & Yamasaki, 2021). However, Barnes and Rutter (2019) state that influencer's excessive posting of products or brands on social media would have a negative effect on consumer memory and response.

5.2.1.2 Brand equity

In the context of brand equity, a majority of respondents of this study believe that influencer marketing can be a useful tool for marketers to create brand awareness. Previous studies have found similar findings with a majority of respondents belief that influencer marketing is a powerful tool in creating brand awareness (Kryl, Brychkova & Zhiltsova, 2023; Gunawan, Novel, Budiyaniti 2023; Ozsacmaci & Dursun, 2020; Xu, 2023).

In addition, a majority of respondents of this study feel that influencer marketing content on social media will assist consumers in recalling brand names. This study also reflects that a majority of respondents can easily recall the brands that an influencer promotes whenever they see or hear about that influencer on television, in the news or on social media. A study conducted in Turkey, also found that influencer marketing posts are very effective in promoting consumers' recall of brands; however, this study also stated that influencer posts on social media were more impactful than those on television or the news due to the advanced interaction that consumers experienced on social media (Tanyeri & Toprak, 2020).

The results of this study also indicate that the majority of the respondents believe that brands promoted by influencers on social media aids in increasing awareness of those brands, whereas the majority of respondents of this study also affirm that they have become familiar with an

unknown brand after viewing brand content from the influencers that they follow on social media. In addition, the results of this study reveal that most of the respondents believe that influencer marketing content on social media assists consumers in gaining additional knowledge about products and brands. A study that was based on Generation Z consumers in India, had similar findings, with 87% of the respondents asserting that influencers on social media increased brand awareness, brand familiarity and provided useful information (Dutta & Bhattacharya, 2023).

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents in this study, believe that influencer marketing enables companies to enhance the image of their brands, while the majority of respondents are also of the opinion that products that are promoted via influencer marketing, portray a strong brand image. A study conducted in India describes social media influencers as powerhouses in enhancing brand image for companies (Shrivastava & Jain, 2022).

The results of this study also reflect that just over one third of the respondents remain loyal to products or brands that they receive information about via influencer marketing content on social media. In addition, this study found that approximately half of the respondents are satisfied with using the brands that their favourite influencers recommend on social media, while approximately two thirds of the respondents believe that it is crucial for companies to use influencer marketing in order to build brand loyalty. A study reflected that influencer posts on social media build brand trust and emotional connections with consumers and this enhances brand loyalty (Jun & Yi, 2020).

A majority of respondents of this study also believed that companies could enhance consumers' perceptions of brand quality by using influencer marketing and more than half of the respondents believe that the brands that they have purchased as a result of influencer marketing initiatives are of good quality. This study also displayed that a majority of respondents feel that the influencer marketing content that they view on social media assists them in assessing the quality of products. According to Berman, Oery and Zheng (2023), influencer marketing plays an important role in social learning for consumers and consequently their assessment of product quality before purchase.

5.2.1.3 Students' brand-switching behaviour

In terms of brand-switching behaviour, the majority of the respondents of this study are likely to try a new product or brand that is recommended by influencers that they follow on social

media. According to Hanifawati, Dewanti and Saputri (2019), brand switching and trying out new products are most prevalent in Generation Z as a result of influencer marketing.

This study also showed that approximately half of respondents have switched to a different brand after viewing influencer marketing content on social media that was posted by the influencers that they follow. In addition, a majority of respondents of this study feel that customers will not switch between brands if they are satisfied with the quality of the brands that are promoted by influencers. This study also revealed that the majority of the respondents believe that companies need to use influencer marketing in order to encourage consumers to switch to their brands. A study conducted in Russia stated that although influencers have the potential to bring about consumer brand-switching or brand loyalty, there are negative consequences that arise if this potential, brand control and brand image are not properly managed, such as companies not attaining the desired outcome or return on investment from influencer marketing or consumers switching to competitor brands (Kryl et al., 2023).

5.2.1.4 Intercorrelations between students' attitudes towards brands and other key dimensions of the study

As reflected in the tabulation of the correlation between the key dimensions of the study in Chapter Four, these results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands and the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The implication of that significant relationship is that UKZN students who have positive attitudes towards brands as a result of influencer marketing and more likely to practice brand loyalty, purchase and encourage others to purchase those brands.

5.2.1.5 Influences of biographical variables on students' attitudes towards brands

The results of this study reveal that the perceptions of UKZN students towards brands as a result of influencer marketing are impacted by certain biographical variables such as gender, education level and college. As per the results of this study, males are more likely to form

positive attitudes towards brands based on influencer marketing than their female counterparts, as well as students with a Master's degree that belong to the College of Law and Management Studies are more inclined to form positive attitudes towards brands as a result of influencer marketing.

5.2.2 The impact of influencer credibility on students' purchasing decisions

The second objective of the study was to ascertain the impact that influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) has on UKZN students' purchasing decisions. The findings will be discussed below.

5.2.2.1 Influencer credibility

As per the results of this study, a majority of respondents feel that the credibility of influencers impacts their purchase decisions of products or brands that the influencers promote, whereas approximately more than half of the respondents assert that they are likely to purchase a new or unfamiliar brand if a credible influencer posts content about the brand on social media. Additionally, studies have shown results that align with this study, stating that influencer credibility has a highly significant impact on consumer purchases, more especially with regard to the purchase of unfamiliar brands (Devi & Mahapatra, 2022; Lee, 2020; Mandiri, Jamhari & Darwanto, 2022; Zaman, Anwar & Haque, 2023).

Moreover, the majority of the respondents of this study are likely to stop following an influencer who engages in negative behaviour and approximately half of the respondents believe that the attractiveness of the influencer impacts purchase decisions of brands that they promote on social media. The results of this study further indicate that the majority of the respondents feel that companies that use attractive influencers will be able to make their brands more appealing to consumers, whereas approximately more than half of the respondents feel that influencer reviews are more trustworthy than company-controlled reviews. Studies have also had similar findings, stating that consumers find influencer reviews more trustworthy than company adverts or posts on products and brands and this has a significant impact on consumer purchases. However, when influencers engage in negative behaviour it negatively impacts the influencer's credibility, trustworthiness and, consequently, consumer purchases (Ata, Arslan, Baydaş & Pazvant, 2022; Zaman et al., 2023). Attractiveness plays an important role in influencer marketing as it motivates consumers to engage with the influencer and results in impulse purchases and overall increased purchases (Immanue & Alexandria, 2021; Trevedi,

2021). In contrast, a study reflected that for the Indonesian fashion market, in terms of influencer marketing dependability and competence are regarded as more impactful on consumer purchases when being compared to attractiveness (Utami & Elizabeth, 2023).

Furthermore, a majority of respondents of this study believe that the honesty and integrity of influencers are crucial in influencing consumers' purchase decisions, while the majority of the respondents believe that the negative behaviour of an influencer will alter their perceptions of the products or brands. According to the results of this study, approximately two thirds of the respondents feel that they are likely to base their purchase decisions on the competency and expertise of the influencer in terms of the product or brand. The results of this study further indicate that the majority of the respondents feel that an influencer who has a high level of expertise in the product category will be a credible source of brand information, whereas the most significant number of respondents believe that influencers who have first-hand usage experience of brands are more likely to enhance their credibility and consumer attitudes towards brands. Additional studies have found similar findings, by which factors such as influencer expertise, content authenticity and trustworthiness contribute to an influencer's credibility and, subsequently, positively impact consumer purchase intentions (Devi & Mahapatra, 2022; Lee, 2022; Martiningsih, & Setyawan, 2022; Yu & Kim, 2020).

The results of this study further indicate that a majority of respondents assert that the degree of familiarity of the influencer has a positive impact on their purchase decisions, while the majority of the respondents are also likely to follow influencers who are similar to them in terms of lifestyle and character traits. In addition, the majority of the respondents of this study believe that influencers who create an emotional bond through similarity will be better able to persuade consumers to purchase the brands that they promote, while the majority of the respondents also believe that popular influencers with large social media followings are likely to persuade consumers to purchase a particular brand. Studies have found that influencer familiarity, popularity and similarity are impactful on consumer purchases, however, credibility, product expertise and trustworthiness were found to have a greater impact in this area (Kareem & Venugopal, 2023; Mandiri et al., 2022; Magano et al., 2022). These studies also found that emotional bonds formed by influencers with consumers further enhances the effect that credibility, product expertise, trustworthiness and similarity have but do not measure up to the level that these factors have as an independent variable (Kareem & Venugopal, 2023; Mandiri et al., 2022; Magano et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the majority of respondents of this study, are of the opinion that the influencer's likeability will add value to the brand that he/she promotes, while the largest portion of respondents feel that companies can rely on popular influencers to draw attention to their brands in a cluttered environment. The results of this study further indicate the majority of the respondents believe that influencer popularity favourably influences consumers' feelings, brand attitudes and purchase behaviour. Studies have shown similar findings and state that likeability and popularity of influencers form a stronger combination as tools used together to influence consumer behaviour than they would be when used independently (Collenberg et al., 2019; de Veirman et al., 2017). Furthermore, these factors create parasocial interaction between influencers and consumers which is needed to impact consumer purchase intentions, which is most effective in the fashion industry (Collenberg et al., 2019; Tsarashafa & Qastharin, 2021). However, in contrast, a study found that if popular and likeable influencers follow very few social media accounts or pages in turn, this eventually diminishes the effect of influencer popularity and likeability on consumer purchases (de Veirman et al., 2017).

5.2.2.2 Intercorrelations between the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchasing decisions and other key dimensions of the study

As reflected in the tabulation of the correlation between the key dimensions of the study in Chapter Four, these results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions and the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The implication of that significant relationship is that UKZN students' purchases that are influenced by influencer credibility are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards brands as a result of influencer marketing and more likely to practice brand loyalty, purchase and encourage others to purchase those brands.

5.2.2.3 Influences of biographical variables on the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchasing decisions

The results of the study reveal that the purchases of UKZN students that are impacted by the credibility of influencers are affected by gender, educational level and college. The results indicate that males, who have a Master's degree and belong to the College of Law and Management Studies are more likely to be impacted by influencer credibility with regards to their purchase decisions.

5.2.3 The effect of influencer marketing on UKZN students' purchasing decisions

The third objective of the study was to investigate the effect that influencer marketing has on the purchasing behaviour of UKZN students. In this regard, the sub-questions of the study include determining if brand communication content of influencers on social media influenced UKZN students' purchase decisions, uncovering the influence that electronic word of mouth through content sharing on social media has on the purchase decisions of UKZN students and to ascertain UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online brand content of influencers on purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2.3.1 Brand communication content on social media

The majority of respondents in this study admit that influencer marketing content on social media allows them to evaluate different products or brands before making their purchase decisions, while approximately more than half of the respondents are likely to purchase products or brands after viewing influencer marketing content on social media. A study conducted in Indonesia had similar findings, stating that influencer marketing plays an important role in the various stages of the consumer-decision-making process, most especially, the evaluation of alternatives stage by reducing consumer effort to find the best-suited product and shopping duration (Huseynov et al., 2016; Mandiri et al., 2022). According to Mandiri et al., (2022), influencer marketing plays a significant role in impacting consumer purchases, when consumers view influencer marketing content on social media.

However, approximately less than half of the respondents of this study feel that they get value for money whenever they purchase products or brands that are recommended by influencers. Additional studies have found that multiple consumers have agreed that consumers obtain value for money when purchasing products or brands that are recommended by influencers

(Huseynov et al., 2016; Nikolaeva & Sriram, 2006; Pathak et al., 2010; Sénécal & Nantel, 2004).

Furthermore, a majority of the respondents in this study affirm that their purchase of a product or brand was as a result of the persuasiveness of influencer marketing content that they had received regarding that product or brand, while the majority of the respondents also believe that influencer marketing's comparison of alternative brands of products saves them time and money. In addition, the majority of the respondents of this study affirm that an influencer's behaviour that promoted a brand, directly influenced purchase decisions of the brand. A study conducted in India reflected that influencer marketing is highly influential on consumer purchases if it is relevant to their interest, informative and educational as well as exhibits customer engagement making it easier for consumers to get the information needed and make purchases thereafter (Srivastava et al., 2022).

5.2.3.2 eWOM through content sharing on social media

The results of this study reveal that the majority of the respondents affirm that they inform their family and friends about the products or brands that are promoted by the influencers that they follow on social media. The results of this study further indicate that the majority of the respondents affirm that they became familiar with unknown products or brands after family and friends shared influencer marketing content about these products or brands on social media, whereas the majority of the respondents attest to having made purchases of products and brands after receiving influencer marketing content from family and friends. Studies have found that influencer marketing content sharing through eWOM helps messages go viral and, consequently, has a significant impact on consumer purchases (Ferrao & Alturas, 2018; Sulthana, 2019; Zurin & Tugiman, 2022). However, a contrasting study that was conducted in Indonesia found that for influencer marketing eWOM, when compared to other independent variables, had the most insignificant contribution to brand image and consequently did not impact consumer purchases (Anggraeni et al., 2023).

In addition, the majority of respondents of this study, believe that the sharing of influencer marketing content on social media will encourage consumers to purchase products or brands, while the majority of the respondents are likely to gain more knowledge about products or brands after viewing content that is posted by the influencers on social media. A study based on younger consumers, similarly, displayed that influencer marketing content on social media

enhanced consumers' brand knowledge and encouraged purchases, more significantly for younger, female consumers as opposed to their male counterparts (Bilro et al., 2020).

5.2.3.3 Online brand content during the COVID-19 pandemic

The majority of respondents in this study felt that online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic was very informative. The results of this study also reveal approximately less than half of the respondents attest that they relied upon influencer marketing content posted on social media to learn more about the pandemic, whereas approximately two fifths of the respondents affirm that they trusted the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies found similar findings, stating that consumers relied on influencer marketing brand content during the pandemic for its relevance of information and guidance which influenced consumer purchases (Guptaa, 2021; Lee, 2020). Furthermore, studies also found that consumer trust in online brand content was negatively impacted by the government and their healthcare agencies during the pandemic as a result of false information and lack of credibility (Kim et al., 2023; Walsh et al., 2022).

Furthermore, approximately half of the respondents of this study attest that they purchased brands after viewing online brand content that influencers posted during the COVID-19 pandemic, while a majority of the respondents feel that the companies that relied on influencer marketing via digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic were able to market their products or brands more successfully. A study based in India found similar findings, in attributing brand image as a greater contributor to consumer purchases of products during the COVID-19 pandemic as opposed to influencer marketing posts which had moderate consumer purchases (Putri & Tiarawati, 2021). Additionally, studies found that in the online market space during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies that used influencer marketing were very successful in boosting consumer buying interest and the support of local brands (Safitri et al., 2022; Yuliana et al., 2022).

The majority of the respondents of this study also attest that they were able to develop a favourable attitude towards brands after reviewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies have shown that consumers did not develop favourable attitudes towards all brands during the pandemic (Mundel & Yang, 2021; Özsomer et al., 2022; Yaacob et al., 2021). Positive consumer attitudes were only developed during the COVID-19 pandemic for brands that served a related purpose due to a shift in

consumer needs during the pandemic and brand-adapted messages of influencer marketing that were aligned accordingly (Mundel & Yang, 2021; Özsomer et al., 2022; Yaacob et al., 2021).

5.2.3.4 Intercorrelations between effect of influencer marketing on students' purchasing decisions and other key dimensions of the study

As reflected in the tabulation of the correlation between the key dimensions of the study in Chapter Four, these results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between the effect of influencer marketing on students' purchasing decisions and the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The implication of that significant relationship is that UKZN students' purchases that are influenced by influencer marketing are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards brands as a result of influencer marketing and more likely to practice brand loyalty, purchase and encourage others to purchase those brands.

5.2.3.5 Influences of biographical variables on the effect of influencer marketing on students' purchasing decisions

The results of the study reveal that the purchases of UKZN students that are impacted by influencer marketing between the ages of 30 and 33, who have a Master's degree and belong to the College of Law and Management Studies were more likely to encourage others to make purchases through eWOM and make purchases during the pandemic.

5.3. SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section will provide a summary analysis of the key findings of the study.

The first objective of the study was to determine the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' perceptions of brands. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study were, to determine if influencer marketing has an effect on UKZN students' attitudes towards brands, as well as to uncover UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing

in creating brand equity (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality) and finally to investigate the impact that influencer marketing has on UKZN students' decisions to engage in brand-switching behaviour. The results of the study reveal that the majority of UKZN students:

- ❖ Believe that content that influencers post about brands on social media will create positive consumer attitudes towards these brands.
- ❖ Are of the belief that influencers are able to influence consumers' attitudes towards brands.
- ❖ Have moderate trust in the opinion of the influencers that they follow on social media.
- ❖ Are likely to develop a favourable attitude towards brands that they promote.
- ❖ Are likely to form a positive attitude towards products or brands after viewing the content posted by the influencer about the products or brands on social media.
- ❖ Often remember products or brands based on the influencer marketing content that is posted or shared on social media.
- ❖ Feel that influencer marketing is a useful tool for marketers to create brand awareness.
- ❖ Feel that influencer marketing content on social media will assist consumers in recalling brand names.
- ❖ Can easily recall the brands that an influencer promotes whenever they see or hear about that influencer on television, in the news or on social media.
- ❖ Believe that influencers on social media help to increase awareness of brands that they promote.
- ❖ Affirm that they have become familiar with an unknown brand after viewing content about that brand from the influencers that they follow on social media.
- ❖ Believe that influencer marketing content on social media assists consumers in gaining additional knowledge about products and brands.
- ❖ Believe that influencer marketing enables companies to enhance the image of their brands.
- ❖ Are of the opinion that products that are promoted via influencer marketing portray a strong brand image.
- ❖ Remain somewhat loyal to products or brands that they receive information about via influencer marketing content on social media.
- ❖ Experience moderate satisfaction with using the brands that their favourite influencers recommend on social media.

- ❖ Believe that it is crucial for companies to use influencer marketing in order to build brand loyalty.
- ❖ Also believed that companies can enhance consumers' perceptions of brand quality by using influencer marketing.
- ❖ Believe moderately that the brands that they have purchased as a result of influencer marketing initiatives are of good quality.
- ❖ Feel that the influencer marketing content that they view on social media assists them in assessing the quality of products.
- ❖ Likely to try a new product or brand that is recommended by influencers that they follow on social media.
- ❖ Have, to a moderate extent, switched to a different brand after viewing influencer marketing content on social media that was posted by the influencers that they follow.
- ❖ Will not switch between brands if they are satisfied by the quality of the brands that are promoted by influencers.
- ❖ Believe that companies need to use influencer marketing in order to encourage consumers to switch to their brands.

In terms of the second objective of the study, which aimed to ascertain the impact that influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) has on UKZN students' purchasing decisions, the results of the study reveal that the majority of UKZN students:

- ❖ Feel that the credibility of influencers impacts their purchase decisions of products or brands that the influencers promote.
- ❖ Are, to a moderate extent, likely to purchase a new or unfamiliar brand if a credible influencer posts content about the brand on social media.
- ❖ Believe that the attractiveness of the influencer moderately impacts purchase decisions of brands that they promote on social media.
- ❖ Feel that companies that use attractive influencers will be able to make their brands more appealing to consumers.
- ❖ Feel moderately that influencer reviews are more trustworthy than company-controlled reviews.
- ❖ Believe that the honesty and integrity of influencers are crucial in influencing consumers' purchase decisions.

- ❖ Believe that the negative behaviour of an influencer will alter their perceptions of the products or brands.
- ❖ Are likely to base their purchase decisions on the competency and expertise of the influencer in terms of the product or brand.
- ❖ Feel that an influencer who has a high level of expertise in the product category will be a credible source of brand information.
- ❖ Believe that influencers who have first-hand usage experience of brands are more likely to enhance their credibility and consumer attitudes towards brands.
- ❖ Assert that the degree of familiarity of the influencer has a positive impact on their purchase decisions.
- ❖ Are likely to follow influencers who are similar to them in terms of lifestyle and character traits.
- ❖ Believe that influencers who create an emotional bond through similarity will be better able to persuade consumers to purchase the brands that they promote.
- ❖ Believe that popular influencers with large social media followings are likely to persuade consumers to purchase a particular brand.
- ❖ Are of the opinion that the influencer's likeability will add value to the brand that they promote.
- ❖ Feel that companies can rely on popular influencers to draw attention to their brands in a cluttered environment.
- ❖ Believe that influencer popularity favourably influences consumers' feelings, brand attitudes and purchase behaviour.

The third objective of the study was to investigate the effect that influencer marketing has on the purchasing behaviour of UKZN students. In this regard, the sub-objectives of the study were, to determine if brand communication content of influencers on social media influenced UKZN students' purchase decisions as well as to uncover the influence that electronic word of mouth through content sharing on social media has on the purchase decisions of UKZN students and finally, to ascertain UKZN students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online brand content of influencers on purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study reveal that the majority of UKZN students:

- ❖ Feel that influencer marketing content on social media enables them to evaluate different products or brands before making purchase decisions.

- ❖ Are likely to purchase products or brands after viewing influencer marketing content on social media.
- ❖ Feel somewhat that they get value for money whenever they purchase products or brands that are recommended by influencers.
- ❖ Have purchased a product or brand owing to the persuasiveness of the influencer marketing content that they had received about that product or brand.
- ❖ Believe that influencer marketing saves me time and money in comparing alternative brands of products.
- ❖ Has been directly influenced in their purchase decision by an influencer's behaviour to buy the brand that they promote.
- ❖ Have informed their family and friends about the products or brands that are promoted by the influencers that they follow on social media.
- ❖ Became familiar with unknown products or brands after family and friends shared influencer marketing content about these products or brands on social media.
- ❖ Have made purchases of products and brands after receiving influencer marketing content from family and friends.
- ❖ Believe that the sharing of influencer marketing content on social media will encourage consumers to purchase products or brands.
- ❖ Are likely to gain more knowledge about products or brands after viewing content that is posted by the influencers on social media.
- ❖ Feel that online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic was very informative.
- ❖ Relied somewhat on influencer marketing content posted on social media to learn more about the pandemic.
- ❖ Somewhat trusted the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ Have, to a moderate extent, purchased brands after viewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ Feel that the companies which relied upon influencer marketing on digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic were better able to market their products or brands.
- ❖ Are able to develop a favourable attitude towards brands after reviewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on discussing the results of the study in accordance with the key dimensions of the study. In terms of the objectives of the study, the results indicate that influencer marketing does have an impact on UKZN students' perceptions of brands, as well as assists in creating positive brand attitudes, enhancing brand equity and increased brand switching. Additionally, influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, skills, homophily, popularity and product expertise) does influence consumer purchases. The results of the study further reveal that influencer marketing does impact students' purchase decisions, WOM and eWOM as well as purchases that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter six will provide useful recommendations and competitive strategies that marketers can use for the successful use of influencer marketing.

CHAPTER SIX

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of this study will comprise the recommendations and the conclusion. The recommendations and conclusion are developed based on the importance of influencer marketing on consumers' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour from a University of KwaZulu-Natal student perspective. The recommendations that are presented in this chapter can be adopted by marketers to ensure the articulation of creative influencer marketing strategies for active engagement with university students. Chapter Six also addresses the limitations of this study and recommendations for future studies. This chapter will then conclude the study and wholistically present the outcomes of the study.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The recommendations of the study are based on the importance of influencer marketing on consumers' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour from a University of KwaZulu-Natal student perspective. The key dimensions of the study focused on the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity, the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching, the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions, the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions, the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions and effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.2.1 The impact of influencer marketing on students' perceptions of brands

There were three sub-dimensions that were related to students' perceptions, that were discussed in this study, namely, students' attitudes, brand equity and brand-switching behaviour.

6.2.1.1 Students attitudes

In terms of UKZN (Westville campus) students' attitudes towards brands, the following recommendations are suggested for marketers and companies in relation to influencer marketing:

- ❖ *Enhance consumer trust of brands through influencer selection:* From the results of this study, consumers developed favourable attitudes towards brands based on consumers' level of trust in the influencer's messages and opinions of those brands. Companies should, therefore, be selective of the influencers that represent their brands in terms of the influencer's alignment with their ethos and brand values. This will display influencer authenticity which helps consumers to foster connections with consumers and build their trust. Influencer transparency could also be focused on in the selection process, whereby all sponsored messages and posts could be disclosed by influencers to consumers as stipulated by the Advertising Regulatory Board in South Africa (ARB). This will, consequentially, help influencers to authentically resonate with target audiences, enhance consumer trust and, consequently, create positive consumer brand attitudes.
- ❖ *Enhanced influencer engagement and reach:* This study has reflected that a majority of consumers recall brands that they view through influencer marketing on social media. Marketers and companies can therefore optimise consumer viewing as a tool for brand recall in ensuring that influencer marketing posts are varied and not monotonous, such as interactive influencer posts with competitions or bidding games online that are linked to brand-related prizes. Visually diverse influencer posts with the various editing features that are available on the social media platforms should also be considered by marketers to enhance consumer viewing interest (trimming of videos, transition effects between different scenes of videos, creating Reels). Boomerang story posts and Reels on Instagram could also be considered by marketers, adding captions and music to the video and pictorial influencer posts. Furthermore, the linking of influencer posts to South African societal trends, traditions, cultural and socio-cultural nuances, like the various languages, spirit of Ubuntu, youth budgeting due to unemployment, apt for humour and the diverse food will be relatable to consumers. Content should also be tailored to fit into the influencer's persona as well as align with the company's brand image, which ensures that influencer messages on behalf of the brand are seamlessly integrated into posts. This will help marketers to entice consumers to view influencer videos, develop buy-in and strengthen recall of the brand at the same time. Marketers must also ensure that consumer touchpoints that feature on the various social media platforms are linked to the influencer posts such as company websites, additional adverts and customer care services so that consumers may find more information should

they desire to. This will ensure effective engagement and leverage of this tool for brand recall.

- ❖ *Usage of social media view count algorithms to enhance brand recall:* This study has displayed that a majority of consumers recall brands as a result of viewing influencer marketing posts. Marketers can therefore make use of view count algorithms on social media which provide information such as the number of consumers that viewed an influencer marketing post, the type of content that enticed consumers to watch the video for its entire duration and picks up patterns like peak times for viewership. In using this digital tool on social media, companies can effectively capitalise off influencer marketing viewership, enhance consumer experience and, consequently, maximise brand recall.

6.2.1.2 Brand equity

In terms of UKZN (Westville campus) students' perceptions of building brand equity, the following recommendations are suggested for marketers and companies in relation to influencer marketing:

- ❖ *Strategic influencer and brand collaboration:* The results of this study indicate that influencer marketing increases brand awareness, enhances consumer familiarity with unknown brands, positively impacts brand image and also helps consumers to evaluate the quality of products. Marketers should, therefore, strategically collaborate with influencers with the objective of enhancing these areas. This can be effectively done with the use of data analytics that social media platforms have today, which are used to interpret and organise information that the algorithms have gathered. The data analytics can help marketers to select influencers that have a great following and that are very impactful in their sector and can then collaborate with these influencers with content that could introduce a new product to build brand equity.
- ❖ *Consumer enticement through share of brand information:* Marketers need to ensure that collaboration between brands and influencers, present information that helps to build brand equity is effective in the sense that content formats are interactive, storytelling is applied while videos are being viewed (especially effective in the beauty industry while doing make-up on videos and brands are spoken about), brands are displayed in creative ways as part of the influencer marketing content, as opposed to

the obvious and mundane approach of speaking about brands with purely a sales driven agenda.

- ❖ *Fostering brand loyalty through relationships and connections:* Marketers should also ensure that long-term connections are built with consumers so that they develop patronage over competitor brands. Linking brand content to influencers that represent values that resonate with consumers helps to foster these relationships and connections, such as those that speak about going green and minimising negative environmental effects or those that support small businesses and local brands in South Africa. Consumers admire these distinguishing practices in the competitive marketplace and will want to, consequently, follow in the usage and affiliations to other brands that these influencers have. Marketers can also use Reach and Impressions algorithms on social media to ensure that the influencer values selected ensure that this recommendation is effectively creating brand loyalty.

6.2.1.3 Brand-switching behaviour

In terms of UKZN (Westville campus) students' perceptions on brand-switching behaviour, the following recommendations are suggested for marketers and companies in relation to influencer marketing:

- ❖ *Showcasing of testimonials and product experiences:* As per the results of the study, consumers are likely to try a new brand that is recommended by influencers whom they follow on social media. Marketers can therefore drive brand switching strategically from competitor brands to their own by collaborating with influencers (in their respective fields) to showcase positive testimonials of users of a new brand or products as well as speaking about their own positive experiences in their content shared on social media. Marketers should be cognisant of the Advertising Regulatory Body (ARB) in South Africa that prohibits companies from engaging in direct comparative advertising and denigration of named competitor products when applying this strategy in relation to influencer posts on testimonials and product experiences.
- ❖ *Sentiment algorithm analysis:* This could also be used to pre-assess positive and negative comments or sentiments towards brands, and marketers could, thereafter, use this information to their advantage in promoting brand switching through influencer marketing based on the positive comments and sentiments.

- ❖ *Incentives for brand trials:* To increase market share through brand switching, marketers can take it a step further with influencer marketing, especially for high-involvement brands that are less affordable to consumers. When consumers show interest in the brands as per the influencers' showcasing on social media, this could be paired with the product launch or promotional campaigns. Consumers could be enticed to go for a trial use of the product in-store and also receive a few free samples before they need to make a purchase and essentially switch brands. This would help to drive sales and take the steps that are necessary for this nature of brands.

6.2.2 The impact of influencer credibility on students' purchasing decisions

In terms of UKZN (Westville campus) students, the following recommendations are suggested for marketers and companies in relation to influencer credibility on purchase decisions:

- ❖ *Fostering effective connections through influencer partnerships:* According to the results of this study, consumers feel that influencer credibility and other factors, such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, familiarity and likeability help unfamiliar brands to get noticed and increase consumer engagement and purchases. Marketers should, therefore, leverage off influencer credibility as a powerful driver of consumer purchases to impact consumer perceptions, by partnering with influencers who display a level of expertise regarding their product, are likeable and popular and also uphold a good image and persona to mitigate adverse perceptions and, consequently, sales. Influencers who are relatable and form emotional connections with consumers should also be partnered with, such as having shared cultural references or sharing content that the youth can relate to in terms of the challenges, peer pressure or trends that they are following, as this will increase purchase intent and drive brand affinity.

6.2.3 The effect of influencer marketing on UKZN students' purchasing decisions

There were three sub-dimensions related to students' purchasing decisions, which were discussed in this study, namely brand communication content on social media, eWOM through content sharing on social media, and online brand content during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.2.3.1 Brand communication content on social media

In terms of UKZN (Westville campus) students, the following recommendations are suggested for marketers and companies in relation to brand communication content on social media:

- ❖ *Perceived value enhanced through influencer recommendations online:* The results of this study indicate that consumers find influencer marketing brand content on social media very helpful for insights on products and services during their purchase decision-making process in narrowing down their choices and saving them time. Marketers should therefore ensure that influencer content posted on social media during the post-purchase stage of the consumer decision-making process appeals to consumers during all the various stages of the consumer's decision-making process. For example, highlighting the benefits of long-term usage of a brand's product in influencer communication content to stimulate longevity of usage and re-purchases of the product. Furthermore, to enhance consumers' perceived value pre-purchase, influencer content on social media should be transparent, informative, authentic and interactive to keep consumers interested and engaged; consequently, increasing purchases. For example, influencer communication content on Instagram or TikTok could include links to in-depth videos or customer reviews and demonstrations of product usage to other social media platforms that showcase videos of a more comprehensive nature and lengthier duration, like YouTube. This will display transparency and create a sense of trust as consumers view honest feedback, allow for informed decision-making and alleviate any doubts or concerns that consumers may have in relation to making a purchase.

6.2.3.2 eWOM through content sharing on social media

In terms of UKZN (Westville campus) students, the following recommendations are suggested for marketers and companies in relation to eWOM content sharing on social media:

- ❖ *Leverage influencer eWOM to drive consumer engagement, content sharing, knowledge and purchase decisions:* As per the results of the study, consumers share influencer content on products with their family and friends, as they believe it helps them to become more familiar with unknown products and also enhances their knowledge of products. Younger consumers are technically advanced and therefore marketers can use algorithms on social media to track engagement metrics (likes, shares/re-tweets, comments, relevance and engagement rate) to understand how

effective an influencer is in promoting eWOM and consumer purchases. Marketers can use this information to collaborate with influencers who are most effective in their sector in relation to eWOM.

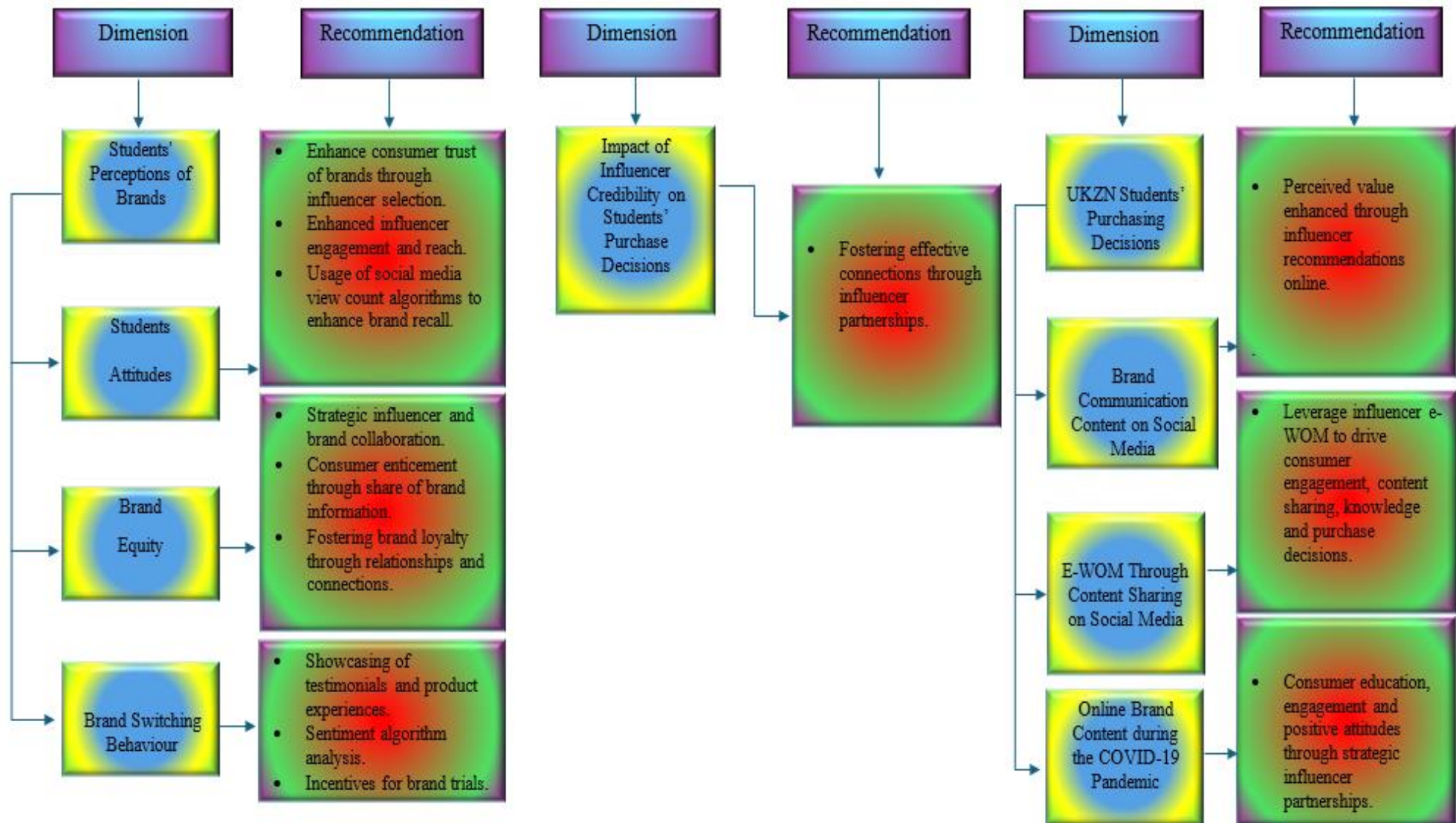
6.2.3.3 Online brand content during the COVID-19 pandemic

In terms of UKZN (Westville campus) students, the following recommendations are suggested for marketers and companies in relation to online brand content during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- ❖ *Consumer education, engagement and positive attitudes through strategic influencer partnerships:* The results of the study indicate that consumers felt influencer content posted during the COVID-19 pandemic was very informative, educational, trustworthy, resulting in increased purchases, favourable attitudes towards brands and more effective marketing for companies. Marketers should focus on value-driven content to drive consumers' purchases, especially in the household staple shopping and health sector, with related influencer posts that have been verified by professionals in the field or credible sources. This will increase consumer trust with accurate information and result in positive attitudes towards brands and increased purchases.

This chapter presented recommendations that are illustrated as a model of fundamental strategies (Figure 6.1), which help to fulfil the fourth objective of this study, which was to formulate creative influencer marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students.

Figure 6.1: Recommendations for the effective use of influencer marketing when targeting university students



6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study had a limitation as it was conducted on UKZN's Westville Campus and, therefore, excluded the College of Humanities which is based on the UKZN's Howard Campus. An additional limitation was lower response rates from students as questionnaires were filled out online as opposed to in-person. Convenience sampling was used in this study, limiting the generalisability of the findings. There were also restrictions at UKZN owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as social distancing instructions, travel limitations and shutting down of the campuses which have limited research.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study could be expanded to other UKZN campuses as well as possibly on a national or international scale. The focus was on younger consumers (Generation Z) in terms of the population. However, future studies could consider varied age groups or generations in terms of demographics. It would be interesting to compare the findings across various campuses or demographics with the findings of this study.

This study also focused on the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to influencer marketing and the increased online footprint of companies. With the continuous advancement of technology, software, social media platforms and industrial revolutions post-COVID-19, this study could be explored further to discover both additional and related tools that companies could use regarding influencer marketing.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Chapter Six has displayed a broad set of recommended strategies that businesses can use in relation to influencer marketing. These recommendations were based on the impact that influencer marketing has on consumer brand perceptions and purchasing behaviour regarding the key dimensions of the study (the effect of influencer marketing on students' attitudes towards brands; the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand equity; the impact of influencer marketing on brand switching; the impact of influencer credibility on students' purchase decisions; the effectiveness of influencer brand communication content on students' purchase decisions; the influence of eWOM through content sharing on students' purchase decisions; and the effectiveness of influencer content on students' purchase decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Recommendations for future studies were presented. As previously highlighted, influencer marketing impacts UKZN students' brand perceptions and purchase behaviour. Based on the findings of this study, it is strongly recommended that marketers and businesses implement the strategies presented in Figure 6.1. In conclusion, after reflecting on the findings, the objective of the study has been satisfied. The findings display that there is great value in implementing influencer marketing as a strategy targeted at younger consumers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Greetings,

My name is Gareth Daniel Paul (Tel: 0817572335, Email: 206505070@stu.ukzn.ac.za) and I am an M Com (Marketing) student in the School of Management, Information Technology and Governance, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My supervisor is Dr P.D. Oodith (tel: 0312607340, Email: Oodithdp@ukzn.ac.za).

You are invited to consider participating in a research project entitled, Impact of influencer marketing on University of KwaZulu-Natal students' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour. The aim of this study is to uncover creative influencer marketing strategies that marketers can adopt for active engagement with university students. The study is expected to include 375 UKZN – Westville campus students, who are above the age of 18 years. If you choose to participate and remain in the study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire, which should take you about 15 minutes to complete.

Through your participation, I hope to understand the feelings and opinions that UKZN Westville Campus students have towards brands as a result of influencer marketing and related purchase decisions. The results of this survey are intended to contribute in filling the knowledge gap on influencer marketing and its effectiveness in relation to consumers. The study will not involve any risks and/or discomforts.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSSREC/00004259/2022).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (Tel: 0817572335, Email: 206505070@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001
Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Your participation in the study is voluntary and by participating, you are granting the researcher permission to use your responses. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in the study. Your anonymity will be maintained by the researcher and the School of Management, I.T. & Governance and your responses will not be used for any purposes outside of this study.

All data, both electronic and hard copy, will be securely stored during the study and archived for 5 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the study, please contact me or my research supervisor at the numbers listed above.

Sincerely

Gareth Daniel Paul

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I (_____) have been informed about the study entitled, Impact of influencer marketing on University of KwaZulu-Natal students' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour, by Gareth Daniel Paul (Tel: 0817572335, Email: 206505070@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at (Tel: 0817572335, Email: 206505070@stu.ukzn.ac.za).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Witness Date
(Where applicable)

Signature of Translator Date

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A: Biographical Information

Please indicate your selection with a cross (X).

1. Gender

1.	Male	
2.	Female	

2. Age

1.	18-21	
2.	22-25	
3.	26-29	
4.	30-33	
5.	34-37	
6.	38 and over	

3. Race

1.	African	
2.	Coloured	
3.	Indian	
4.	White	
5.	Other (Please specify _____)	

4. Educational Level

1.	Undergraduate	
2.	Honours Degree	
3.	Postgraduate Diploma	
4.	Master's Degree	
5.	Doctoral Degree	

5. Which College do you belong to?

1.	College of Law and Management Studies	
2.	College of Humanities	
3.	College of Health Sciences	
4.	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	

Section B

Please indicate with a cross (X) the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale below:

- 1- Strongly Disagree (SD)
- 2- Disagree (D)
- 3- Neither agree nor disagree (N)
- 4- Agree (A)
- 5- Strongly Agree (SA)

No.	Statement	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
1.	I strongly believe that the content that influencers post about brands on social media will create positive consumer attitudes towards these brands.					
2.	I believe that influencers are able to influence consumers' attitudes towards brands.					
3.	I trust the opinion of the influencers that I follow on social media and am likely to develop a favourable attitude towards brands that they promote.					
4.	I am likely to form a positive attitude towards products or brands after viewing the content posted by the influencer about the products or brands on social media.					
5.	I often remember products or brands based on the influencer marketing content that is posted or shared on social media.					
6.	I believe that marketers need to use influencer marketing as it assists in creating awareness of their brands.					
7.	I feel that influencer marketing content on social media will assist consumers in recalling brand names.					
8.	I easily recall the brands that an influencer promotes whenever I see or hear about that influencer on television, in the news or on social media.					
9.	I believe that influencers on social media help to increase awareness of brands that they promote.					
10.	I have become familiar with an unknown brand after viewing content about that brand from the influencers that I follow on social media.					
11.	I believe that influencer marketing content on social media assists consumers in gaining more knowledge about products and brands.					
12.	I believe that influencer marketing enables companies to enhance the image of their brands.					
13.	I am of the opinion that products that are promoted via influencer marketing portray a strong brand image.					

No.	Statement	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
14.	I am loyal to products or brands that I receive information about via influencer marketing content on social media.					
15.	I am satisfied with using the brands that my favourite influencers recommend on social media.					
16.	I believe that it is crucial for companies to use influencer marketing in order to build brand loyalty.					
17.	I feel that companies can enhance consumers' perceptions of brand quality by using influencer marketing.					
18.	I believe that the brands that I have purchased as a result of influencer marketing initiatives are of a good quality.					
19.	I feel that the influencer marketing content that I view on social media assists me in assessing the quality of products.					
20.	I am likely to try a new product or brand that is recommended by influencers that I follow on social media.					
21.	I have switched to a different brand after viewing influencer marketing content on social media that was posted by the influencers that I follow.					
22.	I feel that customers will not switch between brands if they are satisfied by the quality of the brands that are promoted by influencers.					
23.	I believe that companies need to use influencer marketing in order to encourage consumers to switch to their brands.					
24.	I feel that the credibility of influencers impacts my decision to purchase products or brands that they promote.					
25.	I am likely to purchase a new or unfamiliar brand if a credible influencer posts content about the brand on social media.					
26.	I am likely to stop following an influencer who engages in negative behaviour.					
27.	I believe that the attractiveness of the influencer impacts my purchase decisions of brands that they promote on social media.					
28.	I feel that companies will be able to make their brands more appealing to consumers by using attractive influencers.					
29.	I am of the opinion that influencer reviews are more trustworthy than company-controlled reviews.					
30.	I believe that the honesty and integrity of influencers are crucial in influencing consumers' purchase decisions.					
31.	I believe that the negative behaviour of an influencer will alter my perceptions of the products or brands.					
32.	I am likely to base my purchase decisions on the competency and expertise of the influencer in terms of the product or brand.					
33.	I feel that an influencer who has a high level of expertise in the product category will be a credible source of brand information.					

No.	Statement	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
34.	I believe that influencers who have first-hand usage experience of brands are more likely to enhance their credibility and consumer attitudes towards brands.					
35.	The degree of familiarity of the influencer has a positive impact on my purchase decisions.					
36.	I am likely to follow influencers who are similar to me in terms of lifestyle and character traits.					
37.	I believe that influencers who create an emotional bond through similarity will be better able to persuade consumers to purchase the brands that they promote.					
38.	I believe that popular influencers with large social media followings are likely to persuade consumers to purchase a particular brand.					
39.	I am of the opinion that the influencer's likeability will add value to the brand that he/she promotes.					
40.	I feel that companies can rely on popular influencers to draw attention to their brands in a cluttered environment.					
41.	I believe that influencer popularity favourably influences consumers' feelings, brand attitudes and purchase behaviour.					
42.	Influencer marketing content on social media allows me to evaluate different products or brands before making my purchase decisions.					
43.	I am likely to purchase products or brands after viewing influencer marketing content on social media.					
44.	I feel that I get value for money whenever I purchase products or brands that are recommended by influencers.					
45.	I have purchased a product or brand due to the persuasiveness of the influencer marketing content that I had received about that product or brand.					
46.	I believe that influencer marketing saves me time and money in comparing alternative brands of products.					
47.	An influencer's behaviour has directly influenced my purchase decision to buy the brand that he/she promotes.					
48.	I inform my family and friends about the products or brands that are promoted by the influencers that I follow on social media.					
49.	I became familiar with unknown products or brands after family and friends shared influencer marketing content about these products or brands on social media.					
50.	I have made purchases of products and brands after receiving influencer marketing content from family and friends.					
51.	I believe that the sharing of influencer marketing content on social media will encourage consumers to purchase products or brands.					

No.	Statement	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
52.	I am likely to gain more knowledge about products or brands after viewing content that is posted by the influencers on social media.					
53.	I feel that online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic was very informative.					
54.	I relied upon influencer marketing content posted on social media to learn more about the pandemic.					
55.	I trusted the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic.					
56.	I have purchased brands after viewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic.					
57.	I feel that the companies that relied upon influencer marketing on digital platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic were better able to market their products or brands.					
58.	I was able to develop a favourable attitude towards brands after reviewing the online brand content that was posted by influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic.					

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL



24 June 2022

Gareth Daniel Paul (206505070)
School Of Man Info Tech & Gov
Westville Campus

Dear GD Paul,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004259/2022

Project title: Impact of influencer marketing on University of KwaZulu-Natal students' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 30 May 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 24 June 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX 4: EDITING CERTIFICATE

Ricky Woods Academic Editing Services

Editing Certificate

Ricky Woods Academic Editing Services
Cell: +27 (0)83 3126310
Email: rickywoods604@gmail.com

To Whom It May Concern
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Editing of a Master's Dissertation

I, Marietjie Alfreda Woods, hereby certify that I have completed the editing and correction of the dissertation: **Impact of influencer marketing on University of KwaZulu-Natal students' perceptions of brands and purchase behaviour** by Gareth Daniel Paul, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Commerce Marketing Management. I believe that the dissertation meets with the grammatical and linguistic requirements for a document of this nature. The following aspects were covered in the process of the editing:

- A full language edit was completed, including grammar, spelling, concord, clumsy expression;
- Reference formatting was checked according to the stipulated APA7 style used by the author;
- Heading styles and captions were standardised in accordance with requirements, to ensure an accurate Table of Contents, and Lists of Figures and Tables;
- Page formatting and pagination were checked.

Name of Editor: Marietjie Alfreda Woods

Qualifications: BA (Hons) (Wits); Copy-editing and Proofreading (UCT); Editing Principles and Practice (UP); Accredited Text Editor (English) (PEG)

MA (Ricky) Woods



25 May 2024



Ricky Woods
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