THE EFFECT OF INSTAGRAM INFLUENCERS ON YOUNG ADULTS' INTENTION TO PURCHASE CLOTHES

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Social media (SM) platforms have become integral to purchasing processes. Both young people and companies spend most of their time on these platforms. Especially in the last 10 years, with SM influencers playing an active role in purchasing, companies have started to prefer using SM instead of traditional media, and consumers have turned to online platforms to make purchases. The contribution of influencers to the purchasing process through platforms is quite high, especially among young consumers. The aim of the study is to determine the effect of SM influencers on the clothing purchase intentions of young adults of various age ranges living in Turkey. The data were collected through an online questionnaire designed with the Google form tool, and the hypotheses were tested with partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). According to the results obtained from the study, clothes advertised by influencers increase the purchase intentions of their followers. Trust is an important factor in purchasing products through SM. In this study, trust in the influencer affects the intention to purchase clothes. In the study, it was also found that the physical attractiveness of the influencers did not have any effect on product purchase intention. The influence of Instagram influencers on the purchase process has an indirect effect between parasocial interaction and purchase intention. In the study, it was also concluded that consumers are also affected by the advertisements on Instagram in the process of purchasing clothes. For this reason, the study also includes findings that will be of interest to researchers working on marketing research.

1. INTRODUCTION

SM are platforms where consumers meet their social needs and share their positive or negative opinions about products and brands. In addition, posts made on SM are data for future consumers (Cuong, 2021). SM has created new ways for users to interact with influencers and has played an important role in realising interactions such as becoming a member of SM, discussing with influencers, reading their tweets, sending messages, instantly following influencers on SM and participating in their activities (Brown, 2015).

In a study, young people were asked which SM platforms they were members of, and it was concluded that the three applications with the highest membership were Instagram (93%), YouTube (75%) and Twitter (59%), respectively (Baş et al., 2023). The Instagram algorithm

analyses the interests of users and determines the posts shown in the "discover section". This algorithm works by collecting data about the interests and behaviours of Instagram users. Thanks to this feature, Instagram offers special recommendations for each user. Companies that are aware of the effectiveness of advertisements tailored to the characteristics of consumers make use of SM tools such as Instagram to understand consumer behaviour and take Instagram into consideration when creating targeted advertising campaigns (Sarıyer & Zümrüt, 2017).

Access to SM platforms, especially by teenagers and young adults, has recently become the sole purpose of internet use, with the video sharing site YouTube ranking first in the ranking of the most popular SM platforms, while the photo and video sharing application Instagram ranked second. When the rates of individuals using social networks are analysed according to age groups, it is seen that approximately 89% of individuals between the ages of 16-24 are on SM. According to a study conducted in July, it is estimated that the number of SM users in Turkey will exceed 76 million by 2027 (Statista, 2024).

The ever-changing and developing world transforms consumers' purchasing intentions and behaviours. This situation has led brands to seek new strategies. Brands have adopted SM, which is used extensively to convey their messages to consumers, as an important advertising medium and have had to adapt their messages to SM platforms in a way that consumers can interact directly (Oyman & Akıncı, 2019). With the increasing popularity of SM, marketing managers have shifted their budgets and attention to SM marketing methods. One of these methods, 'influencer marketing', has become a conversion method that involves companies collaborating with influencers to promote their products (De Veirman et al., 2017).

According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), SM platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are the most effective tools that provide detailed information about products and services to reach maximum consumers and increase the profitability of companies. Especially young consumers, inspired by SM influencers, can get up-to-date information about the latest trends in fashion and discuss with influencers (Abdullah et al., 2020).

The brands and products promoted by SM influencers are mostly on clothing, personal care, make-up materials and electronic goods. Toksarı and Mürütsoy (2019) revealed in their study that the participants mostly preferred clothing products among the products promoted through SM influencers. They also found that the participants were influenced by the positive recommendations of the influencers and wanted to buy the products recommended by these

influencers. Influencers take care to promote quality products that are affordable and suitable for student budgets rather than expensive brands.

Gelati and Verplancke (2022) explain that influencers are influential on the purchasing decisions of their followers and that these people share their personal purchases related to fashion and beauty. According to the researchers, followers tend to identify with the influencers, try to imitate them, and buy the products purchased by the influencers. According to the authors, followers behave like their influencers and even desire to be like them.

The fact that SM has become a part of users' lives and the availability of smartphones and tablets have facilitated access to SM. This has led to an increase in the time spent on SM. Many studies on SM use aim to examine the importance and effects of such platforms (Vural & Bat, 2010; Solmaz et al., 2013). The purpose of this study is to examine whether Instagram influencers in Turkey influence consumers' purchase intention as an advertising tool and how effective the advertising messages of the products recommended by the influencers are. In addition, the sub-problems of the study include whether the attitude towards influencers creates a significant difference on brand preference and purchase intention, consumers' motivations for using Instagram, the existence of parasocial relationships with influencers and whether these relationships affect purchase intention and behaviour, and finally, whether the time spent on Instagram affects the participation in posts (liking, disliking, commenting).

Although there are many studies on Instagram and purchase intention in the literature, studies focusing on purchase intention through Instagram influencers are limited, especially in Turkish literature. This study is important in terms of being one of the first studies to examine purchase intention through Instagram influencers and is thought to make a valuable contribution to the literature.

2. LITEREATURE REVIEW

Yıldız and Demir (2016) wanted to investigate the purposes of using the internet and SM of university students, and found significant differences between the time spent on the internet and SM and the purposes of use, and between the frequency of connecting to the internet and the purpose of using the internet. However, no significant difference was found between the purposes of using SM according to gender. Gürel and Alay (2017) examined the effect of SM use on purchasing behaviours of university students. In their study, the researchers found that there is a positive relationship between SM use and purchasing behaviours of students. In

addition, it was revealed that SM is more effective in pre-purchase behaviours than post-purchase behaviours.

Abdullah et al. (2020) aimed to determine the characteristics of SM influencers that contribute to purchase intention in the fashion industry. The findings show that likability, credibility and recognition are the main factors affecting Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products. In their study, Tamara et al (2021) determined that Instagram influencers have a positive correlation with the purchase intentions of Generation Z women who actively use makeup and skin care products and use Instagram in their daily lives. According to the researchers, the number of influencer followers and trust in the influencer affect purchase intention.

In Yaman's (2021) study, to determine whether influencers are perceived as opinion leaders by consumers, an online survey of 500 people was conducted using convenience sampling and the data collected was analysed. The study found that consumers follow influencers in the personal care and apparel sectors the most. According to the results of the study, consumers view influencers as opinion leaders. When the findings obtained from the study of Aktaş and Gürbüz (2022) are analysed, it is concluded that influencers have a positive and significant effect on young consumers' intention to purchase clothes. When this result is analysed in detail, it is concluded that compared to friends or peers, advertisers and opinion leaders, influencers have the most influence on young consumers' intention to purchase clothes.

Influencers play an important role in the adoption of trends in the fashion industry. Agarwal and Jaiwant (2023) studied the impact of social media influencers in the apparel industry. They found that social media influencers have a significant impact on consumer behaviour. Influencers play a key role in shaping consumer preferences and increasing sales.

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

3.1. Data Collection Tool and Sample

The population of the study consists of young adults who are studying in Turkey in the 2023-2024 academic year and are predominantly university students studying in different departments. The answers to the questions in the questionnaire were given by individuals of different age groups living in 30 provinces including Istanbul, Ankara and Eskişehir.

The survey used in the study was applied to 278 people via Google form between October 2023 and November 2023. As a result of the control question analysis, analyzes were performed on 237 reliable data. The questions in the questionnaire were inspired by the studies in the bibliography.

3.2. Research Model and Hypotheses

In line with the aim of the research, a model was developed to determine the effects of Instagram usage, time spent on Instagram, Instagram advertisements, attitudes towards Instagram phenomena, consumer perception in the consumer purchase decision process and the effects of consumers (university students) on clothing products. In this study, a model was created based on the studies of Taşdelen (2020) and Aktaş and Gürbüz (2022). The dependent variable in the model is clothing purchase intention. Dependency, advertisements, reliability, parasocial interaction and physical attractiveness are independent variables. The effect of phenomena on the purchasing process is the mediating variable. Figure 1 shows the model created for the purpose of the research.
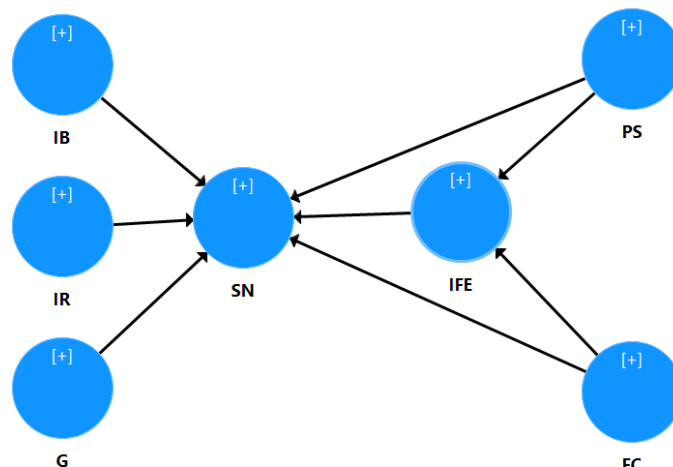
IB- Instagram addiction, IR-Instagram adverts, G-Reliability, PH-Physical attractiveness, IFI-Instagram influencers' influence, PS-Parasocial relationship, SN-Purchase intention

Figure 1. Research Model

The hypotheses to be tested in this study and their explanations are given below.

H1: Instagram addiction affects clothing purchase intention.

Instagram addiction can be defined as the tendency to use Instagram excessively and uncontrollably (Sarıoğlu, 2023). Today, especially the young generation spends a lot of time on Instagram.

H2: Trust in the influencer affects the intention to purchase clothes.

The posts made by influencers about certain product experiences are found to be sincere and reliable by their followers, and this situation affects the brand attitudes of the followers (Ünlükaya & Tosun, 2021). Especially considering that online shopping involves more risks than traditional shopping, consumers need reliable sources of information to minimise the risks associated with the product or purchasing channel (Lee & Turban, 2001). In this context, consumers see SM influencers as experienced and expert people who have knowledge about brands and products (Ki et al., 2020).

H3: Advertisements on Instagram affect young consumers' intention to purchase clothes.

It is very difficult for businesses to directly influence consumers to promote themselves and their products. Therefore, instead of focusing only on traditional media, businesses also utilise the power of SM to communicate with consumers online. With Instagram's algorithm, the adverts that fall on the homepage are arranged in a way to attract the attention of consumers. For this reason, customers inevitably see the advertisements of the products they are interested in on their homepage.

According to Gomes et al. (2022), consumers' attitude towards sponsored posts directly and positively affects purchase intention. The researchers predict that consumers' attitude towards sponsored posts mediates the relationship between expertise and purchase intention.

H4: Influencers "posts affect young consumers" intention to purchase clothes.

With the changes in SM and living standards, influencers have started to share their lives and the products they use every day with short videos. The clothes worn by the influencers attract attention in videos and photographs. The young generation is also influenced by the advertisements and shows purchase intention.

H5: Parasocial interaction affects the intention to purchase clothes.

According to para-social interaction, SM users perceive SM influencers as their close friends. In this theory, users see their influencers as their friends and try to empathise with them (Gelibolu, 2024).

Horton and Wohl (1956) defined parasocial interaction as the imaginary interaction between the user and the phenomenon and stated that this interaction can turn into a self-defined one-way relationship (Brown, 2015). According to Gomes et al. (2022), they think that parasocial

interaction positively affects purchase intention. Masuda et al. (2022) argue that parasocial interaction has a positive effect on purchase intention, and through this interaction, consumers are significantly influenced by phenomenon characteristics.

H6: Parasocial interaction influences the purchase intention of influencers on consumers.

Yuksel and Labrecque (2016) state that parasocial interactions through SM platforms affect consumers cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally. According to the authors, parasocial interactions can guide and inspire both online and offline actions. Karataş et al. (2022) suggest that consumers' parasocial interactions with SM influencers increase their intention to purchase products, services and brands recommended by influencers.

H7: The physical attractiveness of the phenomenon affects the intention to purchase clothes.

Tamara et al. (2021) state that attractiveness and trust have a positive effect on purchase intention.

H8: The physical attractiveness of the phenomenon influences the effect of phenomena on the purchase process.

Messner et al. (2008) state that people who are physically attractive will also be perceived as adequate and good, and thus their persuasive power will be higher (Karataş et al., 2022).

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Demographic Findings

Findings on demographic characteristics are given in Table 1.

When the values in Table 1 are analysed, it is seen that 38% of the participants are male (90) and 62% are female (147). When the participants are analysed according to age, 20.3% of them are between the ages of 17-20, 66.7% between the ages of 21-24, 7.6% between the ages of 25-28, and 0.8% between the ages of 29-32. It was determined that 4.6% of the young people were 32 years old and above. 80.6% of the participants are undergraduate students, 5.1% are associate degree students and 5.1% are high school students. 9.3% of the participants are undergraduate graduates.

Table 1.
Findings Related to Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables	Dimension	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	90	38
	Female	147	62
Age	17-20	48	20.3
	21-24	158	66.7
	25-28	18	7.6
	29-32	2	0.8
	32+	11	4.6
Education level	Undergraduate student	191	80.6
	Bachelor's degree	22	9.3
	Secondary Education (High School)	12	5.1
	Associate degree student	12	5.1
	Other	9	3.8
Instagram Usage time	1-2 hours	90	38
	2-4 hours	84	35.4
	Less than 30 minutes	31	13.1
	4-6 hours	24	10.1
	6 hours and over	8	3.4
Total		237	100

4.2. Statistical Findings

In this study, a two-stage data analysis was conducted. In the first stage, the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs were investigated, and then the research hypotheses were tested.

4.2.1. Validity of the measurement model

Determining the validity component of a measurement involves two elements: convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is related to the degree to which multiple methods used to measure a variable yield the same results. Discriminant validity is the degree to which measurements of different latent variables are unique (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; O'Leary-Kelly & Vokurka, 1998). Three criteria are generally utilised to ensure convergent validity. These measures are Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (Topçuoğlu et al., 2022). CR, CA and AVE can be calculated as (Shrestha, 2021):

$$CR = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \lambda_i^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \lambda_i^2 + \sum_{i=1}^{n} Var(e_i)} \quad (1)$$

where, n is the number of the items, λ_i the factor loading of item i, and $Var(e_i)$ the variance of the error of the item i.

$$CA = \frac{n\bar{r}}{1 + \bar{r}(n-1)} \quad (2)$$

where, n represents the number of items, and $\bar{r}$ is the mean correlation between the items.

$$AVE = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \lambda_i^2}{n} \quad (3)$$

Table 2 shows the values of these three criteria.

Table 2.
Construct Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

Factors	CA	CR	AVE
FÇ	0.855	0.911	0.774
G	0.758	0.863	0.679
IB	0.746	0.852	0.659
IFE	0.653	0.852	0.742
IR	0.735	0.847	0.652
PS	0.728	0.845	0.645
SN	0.834	0.883	0.602

In order to evaluate the reliability of the measurement model, composite scale reliability (CR) and average variance values (AVE) were calculated and the results are shown in Table 1. From the results in Table 1, it is clearly seen that all CR values exceed 0.80 and AVE values of all measurements are higher than the cut-off value of 0.50 suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The lowest AVE value is 0.602 (Fornell and Larcker 1981; Chin 1998; Wetzels et al., 2009). Cronbach's alpha values (CA) are also greater than 0.70.

Table 3.
Fornell- Larcker Criteria

	FÇ	G	IB	IFE	IR	PS	SN
FÇ	0.880						
G	0.494	0.824					
IB	0.338	0.416	0.812				
IFE	0.444	0.610	0.372	0.861			
IR	0.408	0.547	0.355	0.500	0.807		
PS	0.510	0.645	0.413	0.618	0.462	0.803	
SN	0.414	0.634	0.440	0.658	0.720	0.607	0.776

In this study, the Fornell-Lacker criterion was first considered in determining discriminant validity. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE value should be greater than the other correlation values between the latent variables. The AVE value for each construct should be above 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Fornell and Cha, 1994; Hair et al., 2014; Ab Hamid et al., 2017). The results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion are presented in Table 3.

When the values in Table 3 are analysed, the AVE structures vary between 0.338 and 0.880. Except for a few values, all AVE values exceeded the limit value of 0.50.

The other criterion for discriminant validity is the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio. HTMT values close to 1 indicate the absence of discriminant validity (Henseler et al.,

2015; Ab Hamid et al., 2017). HTMT finds widespread application in scientific studies due to its good performance and simple application process. The HTMT value is compared with 0.85 to assess whether discriminant validity is violated, but it can also vary up to a higher limit value of 0.9 or higher (Henseler et al., 2015; Roemer et al., 2021). HTMT can be calculated as (Rönkkö and Cho, 2022):

$$HTMT_{ij} = \frac{\bar{\sigma}_{ij}}{\sqrt{\bar{\sigma}_\iota \bar{\sigma}_J}} \ (4)$$

where σ_i and σ_j denote the average within scale item correlation and $\bar{\sigma}_{ij}$ denotes the average between scale item correlation for two scales i and j.

Table 4.
HTMT Values

	FÇ	G	IB	IFE	IR	PS	SN
FÇ							
G	0.610						
IB	0.423	0.528					
IFE	0.589	0.865	0.510				
IR	0.507	0.703	0.473	0.691			
PS	0.661	0.851	0.526	0.879	0.610		
SN	0.485	0.796	0.538	0.888	0.891	0.767	

Based on the criteria mentioned above, it is seen that the HTMT values in Table 4 are below 0.85. As a result, it is determined that the proposed model meets the Fornell-Larcker and HTMT discriminant validity criteria.

The variance inflation factor (VIF) is used to estimate multicollinearity, but it also assesses the degree of increase in the variance of the estimated regression coefficient. A VIF value equal to 1 means that there is no multicollinearity among the estimators. If it is greater than 1, the estimators are moderately correlated, and if it is between 5 and 10, there is a high correlation between the estimators. Therefore, a VIF value close to or above 5 indicates that the model is poorly estimated and there is a multicollinearity problem (Akinwande et al., 2015). In the study, the VIF value is between 1.305 and 2.221. Since these values are less than 5, it can be said that there is no multicollinearity problem among the latent variables.

Normed Fit Index (NFI) evaluates the fit of the model by comparing the chi-square value of the model with the chi-square value of the null model. NFI values vary between 0 and 1 and values close to 1 indicate a good fit (Bentler & Bonnet, 1980). SRMR values vary between 0 and 1 and values below 0.05 are obtained in models with good fit (Byrne, 1998; Diamantopoulos &

Siguaw, 2000). If the SRMR values take a value such as 0.08, this value is considered acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Hooper et al., 2008).

In this study, SRMR value was 0.073 and NFI value was 0.804. Since these values fulfil the criteria above, it is possible to evaluate that 'the estimation model is suitable for hypothesis testing'.

4.2.2. *Evaluation of the structural model*

SmartPLS programme was used to test the hypotheses of the research and the general view of the path analysis is given in Figure 2
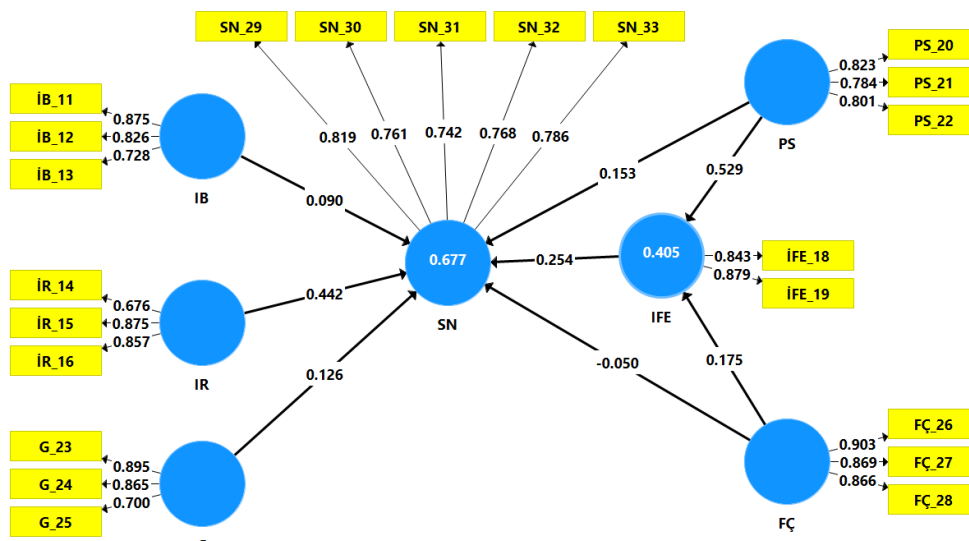
IB- Instagram addiction, IR-Instagram adverts, G-Reliability, PH-Physical attractiveness, IFI-Instagram influencers' influence, PS-Parasocial relationship, SN-Purchase intention

Figure 2. PLS-SEM Results

Figure 2 shows the t values and effect parameters of the factor loadings. Table 5 presents the hypothesis test results.

When the statistical values in Table 5 are analysed, it is seen that all hypotheses except one are supported. Although the study has more than one purpose, the subject that is given priority by the researchers and forms the basis of the study is whether the posts made by influencers are effective on consumers' purchase intentions. According to the results of the hypothesis test, the posts made by influencers on Instagram affect consumers' product purchase intentions (H4). An increase of 1 unit in the posts made by influencers on Instagram leads to an increase of 0.255 units in consumers' product purchase intentions.

Table 5.
Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-values	p-values	Decision
H1: IB→SN	0.089*	2.06	p<0.05	Supported
H2: G→SN	0.126**	2.256	p<0.05	Supported
H3: IR→SN	0.443***	8.61	p<0.001	Supported
H4: IF→SN	0.255***	4.583	p<0.001	Supported
H5: PS→SN	0.153*	2.487	p<0.05	Supported
H6: PS→IFE	0.529***	7.663	p<0.001	Supported
H7: FÇ→SN	-0.051[NS]	1.087	p>0.05	Not Supported
H8: FÇ →IFE	0.175**	2.623	p<0.05	Supported

***P<0.001; **P<0.01; *P<0.05; NS: Not significant

Trust in influencers affects the intention to purchase clothes (H2). Another finding obtained from the hypothesis test results is that young consumers are influenced by the advertisements on Instagram in the process of purchasing clothes (H3). This result shows that the study does not only cover the purchase process of the product by consumers, but also the marketing process of the product is included in the process. It is understood from Table 4 that hypothesis H6 is also supported. Accordingly, parasocial interaction increases the intention to purchase products, services and brands recommended by the phenomena. The physical attractiveness of the phenomena is not effective on the intention to purchase clothes (H7).

In this study, the existence of indirect effects as well as direct effects was investigated. The influence of Instagram influencers in the purchase process has an indirect effect between parasocial interaction and purchase intention.

5. CONCLUSION

While businesses can establish closer relationships with their customers through communication tools such as pictures and videos in their SM accounts, consumers can quickly access the information they need through SM, read comments about products and companies, and compare various products (Uyar, 2018). In other words, SM offer significant advantages to both producers and consumers (Tutar et al., 2015).

Social networks such as Instagram remove barriers such as geographical distances and time constraints, offering the opportunity to reach all people living in different areas. Followers find similarities with their own lifestyles or the lifestyles they would like to have in the content shared by the influencers and develop a sense of closeness or, in other words, a parasocial relationship with the influencers. Followers perceive these people as trustworthy and attractive due to their relationship with influencers (Gelati & Verplancke, 2022).

In this study, it was investigated whether the posts made by Instagram influencers have an effect on the purchase intentions of followers. The study also examined the effect of the personality and physical characteristics of the phenomenon on the clothes purchasing process. Determining the effect of advertisements on Instagram on young consumers' intention to purchase clothes is another subject of the study. It was concluded that the physical characteristics of the phenomenon did not lead to any change in the purchase intention of consumers (followers) who want to buy clothes. Apart from this, trust in Instagram influencers, parasocial interaction, SM posts made by influencers are among the effective factors on the purchase intentions of followers.

Another finding of the study is that consumers are influenced by the advertisements on Instagram and take this criterion into consideration along with the opinions of influencers when deciding whether to buy clothes or not. This result is valuable for businesses that use SM more predominantly than traditional media. It is suggested that researchers should focus on this issue in future studies, especially in the field of marketing.

The results of the hypothesis test showed that the physical characteristics of the phenomena did not have a significant effect on purchase intention. Looking at the studies on this topic, although there are studies with similar findings to this study, the opposite situation is also questionable. The results of Sun et al. (2021) in their study are similar to this study. According to the study, the image of phenomena is not as important as expected for consumer preferences. According to the researchers, phenomena show similar behaviour and performance during the product promotion phase. The researchers define this situation as 'aesthetic fatigue'.

In a study conducted by Kim and Park (2023), in which 364 female consumers who are members of Instagram and other social media accounts responded to an online survey, it was found that there was no direct relationship between the attractiveness of social media influencers and direct purchase intention. Tang et al (2024) found different results to those obtained in this study. The researchers aimed to investigate the effect of physical attractiveness of phenomena on consumer behaviour through an experiment. The study concluded that consumers spend more time with phenomena with higher physical attractiveness.

This study details the impact of social media influencers on user preferences. The benefits to marketers of using influencers in social media advertising are also considered. This study makes important theoretical and methodological contributions to the field of social media and

influencer marketing. Considering the lack of studies in the local literature that focus on these issues, it can be said that the article makes an important contribution to the field.

Influencer marketing research conducted in different countries and cultural contexts should be included more in scientific studies. This will enable the results of the research on the subject to be evaluated from a broader perspective, thus increasing the generalisability of influencer marketing.

The sample is limited to young adults, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Including different age groups and socio-economic levels in the analysis may strengthen the findings of the study. These suggested samples could be considered in future studies and compared with the results of this study to provide recommendations to reader.

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