

An explorative study on the positive role mega influencers have on purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry

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Chanel Erwee

18013488

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Amalia v Schalkwyk

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Abstract

As social media becomes a more integrated part of our lives, influencer marketing has become a marketing trend (Knightley, 2019). People are turning to their favorite Instagram models for advice and recommendations on purchasing decisions. Hence, the research explored the positive effect mega influencers have on the purchasing behavior in the swimwear industry. Research was conducted using the interpretivist paradigm and made use of an explanatory research design. Standardized unstructured in-depth interviews were used as they allowed the researcher to understand participant's perspectives regarding mega influencers and the effect mega influencers have on consumers purchasing behavior. Interviews were conducted in Sparkle Bikini's boardroom whereby qualitative data was collected by 3 swimwear consumers and analyzed using narrative analysis to explore transcripts. Findings indicated that the purchasing behavior of consumers is positively effected by mega influencers in the swimwear industry. Therefore, this research contributes to assist marketing managers with new evidence to support the use of mega influencers in advertising campaigns in effort to effect consumers purchasing behavior positively.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Influencer has been the buzzword for marketers during the last few years (Ehrhardt, 2017). However, the idea of influencers is not new (Brooks, 2019; Ehrhardt, 2017; Mechem, 2018). An example of influencer advertising is seen in figure 1, in 1931, when Santa promoted Coca-Cola (Mechem, 2018). Figure 2 illustrates how Santa is still being used today as an influencer in advertising. In figure 3, a brief history of influencer advertising is given through a timeline. The Queen and the Pope used to endorse medicine for the benefit of the people and they can therefore be seen as some of the earliest influencers (Mechem, 2018). It started in 1760 as regal role models. Then in 1920 influencers were known as fashion icons. Later on, in 1984 there was a trend in marketing to use celebrity endorsement as a marketing tool. In 1997 stars of the screen became popular in advertising. In 2004 the advertising trend changed over to digital diaries. In 2007 companies used model collaborations as a marketing strategy. In 2010 micro bloggers came about. In 2013 it was blog stars and finally in 2015 it was known as it is today social influencers (Ehrhardt, 2017).

The big change in recent years has been social media, giving everyone a platform to share and receive recommendations and information right around the world (Brooks, 2019). For this reason, influencer marketing has transported to the fast growing million-dollar industry we know today (Ehrhardt, 2017). The time of celebrities is on the rise functioning as mega influencers in the sense of a two-step flow approach in a mass-mediated world (Ehrhardt, 2017). This means that celebrities act as opinion leaders and then influence consumers. According to Brooks (2019) the publicity of the celebrity attracts buyers and conditions consumers on products positively.

Influencer marketing is a reliable and trustworthy marketing tool and it can be a game changer when understood, monitored and accessed accurately in regards to return on investment (Preston, 2019). Influencers share almost everything with their followers about their wardrobe, lifestyle, meals and routines (Radin, 2019). In recent years it's become even more popular for influencers to start their own fashion brands, with swimwear being one of the biggest categories (Radin, 2019).

There are so many brands on the market and buyers have a large choice of products to choose from, which makes the buyers decision journey more complex (Ehrhardt, 2017). One of the ways influencers are used is as a testimonial for a brand's marketing strategy to convince a consumer of buying a product (Brand 24, 2019).

This study will include a broad overlook of influencer marketing. It will then be narrowed down as the researcher focuses on specifically mega influencers. After conducting research, the researcher concluded whether the use of mega influencers have a positive effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers.

1.2 Rationale

A study conducted by the influencer marketing hub, Viral nation and Neo ranch in 2019 found that Influencer marketing is still extremely positive despite naysayers claiming that influencer marketing is dying (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). This study will add to the existing research and take a deeper look specifically at mega influencers and their effect on consumer purchasing to determine if swimwear companies can use mega influencers persuade consumers to buy products which will eventually lead to an increase in sales and revenue.

The research problem is that however mega influencers have a massive reach and the advertisement will be seen by incredible amounts of people, mega-influencers can be really expensive (Black, 2017). The research study will therefore test if it is worth investing in mega influencer marketing. A brand from South Africa can get their brand seen by millions of people when using mega influencers in their marketing campaign. The research study can assist businesses in South Africa to make a marketing decision of whether mega influencers will have a positive effect on the business and positively effects consumers purchasing behavior. This will increase sales that will lead to an increase in revenue.

According to Preston (2019) there has not been a lot of research done in South Africa regarding influencers and the power of influencer marketing. Therefore, the research could contribute to existing body of knowledge of mega influencers within South Africa.

The research is relevant as it explores the use of mega influencer marketing, using Swimwear companies to detect the influence of mega influencers on their customers purchasing behavior. Swimwear companies use celebrities and models as influencers in their advertising campaigns (Triangl, 2019; Khan, 2018). Thus, this research explored Swimwear companies as a case study to address whether mega influencers positively effects consumer purchasing behavior within the swimwear industry.

Interestingly, mega-influencers with followings between the 501,000 and 1.5 million mark are considered less-effective brand partners than influencers with smaller followings (Bauck, 2018). Thus, this study will test whether this statement is true in the swimwear industry and if mega influencers are worth investing in and positively effects consumer purchasing behavior. By exploring if social media mega influencers are worth investing in by investigating if they play a positive role on the purchasing behavior of consumers

1.3 Problem Statement

According to previous studies conducted researchers have been able to present that many women are more dissatisfied with their bodies after they have viewed media colored by the thin and beautiful mentality (Belul & Tran, 2017; Nagar & Virk 2017). Therefore, women are dissatisfied about their bodies because of the unrealistic image of models used in advertisements. Influencer marketing can be an effective way to gain new exposure and sales for a brand, although there are many negative elements that can affect a marketing campaign such as a damaged reputation of an influencer or just simply bad implementation of the campaign. (Halpin, 2018; Creul, 2016).

In 2014 Victoria's Secret, one of the biggest lingerie and swimwear companies in the world launched a campaign called the perfect body, seen in figure 4, and only showcased thin and beautiful models stating that they had the perfect body (Luxen, 2014). Subsequently, this resulted in a lot of bad publicity since it was suggested to lower young women's self-esteem who did not fit in this particular category (Peterson, 2014). More than 15,000 people have signed a petition calling on Victoria's Secret to apologize and terminate the campaign (Peterson, 2014). Additionally, the swimwear companies like Triangl continue to use skinny models and influencers in their marketing (Triangl, 2019).

In short the research problem is that mega-influencers can be really expensive and women are dissatisfied with the way they look because of the unrealistic image of models used in advertisements.

In response to the problem, the study proposes to explore and investigate whether the use of mega influencers effects consumer purchasing behavior within the swimwear industry by using a qualitative study approach.

1.4 Research goal

This study focusses on the topic of mega influencers and the effect that mega influencers have on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry. This research study will help the readers and swimwear companies to understand the importance of finding the correct mega influencer ,using a realistic image people can relate to, in marketing campaigns and the effect that the social media influencers will play a positive role in the purchasing behavior of consumers.

The main research goal for this study is:

Are social media mega influencers effective and do they play a positive role in consumer purchasing behavior?

1.5 Purpose statement:

Influencers are people who've spent time building their own brand and cultivating their audience, they will be naturally protective of their reputation and the people who trust them (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). A study revealed that meaning transfer of social media influencers has a positive relationship in illustrating consumer attitude and purchase intention (Xinjean, 2019). The purpose of the study is to investigate the positive effect mega influencer advertising have on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry.

1.6 Research questions derived from the main research question:

1. Does the mega social media influencer have an effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry?
2. Does the following of mega social media influencers effect the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry?
3. Does the body size of the model/influencer used in a marketing campaign effect the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry?

1.7 Objectives

Main objective:

To determine the positive role of mega influencers on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry.

Sub objectives:

1. To explore the positive effect that mega influencers have on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry.
2. To explore whether mega influencers used in a marketing campaigns have a positive effect on purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry.
3. To investigate whether the body size of the model/influencer have an effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry.

2. Literature

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

AIDA resembles probably the most known traditional theory about advertising effect (Vaskaratas & Ambler, 1999). The model laid out a sequence that describes the process a salesperson must lead a potential customer through in order to achieve a sale (Oxford University Press, 2019).

The AIDA model was developed by the American businessman, E. St. Elmo Lewis, in 1898 (Ryte, 2019) and is a behavioral model that has as purpose to make sure that an advertisement raise awareness or attention, stimulate interest, and leads the customer to desire and eventually action (Karlsson, 2017). As seen in Figure 5, AIDA is an acronym for attention, interest, desire and action (Corporate Finance Institute, 2019). For an advertisement to be effective it has to be one that complies with the AIDA model (Ryte, 2019). An advertisements success depends up on the viewer's ability to notice and understand its message (Jones, 2014).

An example of the first step, attention is when a swimwear company advertise and promote a new bikini launch, to grab the attention of consumers. In the second step, interest, the consumer is now aware of the bikini launch the swimwear companies uses well known celebrities or mega influencers to boost interest in the new bikini launch by announcing the mega influencers that will be at the launch. In the third step, desire, swimwear companies use the mega influencers that will be at the new bikini launch to communicate to the target audience about how great the launch is going to be, so the audience is more likely to want to go. In the last step, action, the swimwear companies ends the advertisement with a call to action, a statement that is designed to get an immediate response from consumers (Corporate Finance Institute, 2019) for example, companies gives consumers a coupon code for their first purchase and offers free shipping to all orders that will eventually lead to action.

The AIDA communication theory is applicable to this study to prove that businesses can successfully use mega influencers to advertise swimwear by using AIDA and that will eventually lead to the consumer purchasing the advertised swimwear or taking action.

Literature found in literature review will be based on the theory of advertising effect, the AIDA model.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Social media mega influencers

Influencer Marketing is a hybrid of old and new marketing tools, taking the idea of the celebrity endorsement and placing it into a modern day content-driven marketing campaign (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). According to Swant (2016), twitter users trust influencers nearly as much as their friends (Swant, 2016). Twitter and Annalect found that twitter users report a 5.2 times increase in purchase intent when exposed to promotional content from influencers and 49% of people say they rely on recommendations from influencers when making purchase decisions (Cobain, 2017). Part of the reason why influencer marketing is gaining steam is also because of ad blocking. According to research conducted by Ahmad (2019), around 30% of all internet users now use ad blockers and prefer to hear of product and services from influencers. Based on the above numbers and trends, it is obvious that influencer marketing shape consumer buying behavior and influence their purchases.

32% of women report feeling unhappy with how their body looks when at the beach or in a bathing suit (Ipsos, 2018). This is because of magazines major influence on their concept of what a perfect body shape should look like (Suggett, 2019) and the thin body ideal dominating today's media (Belul & Tran, 2017). Over the years, the media has propagated almost unattainable body images as ideal for women and the unattainability of the images is evident in the omnipresence of size 0 models and celebrities (Nagar & Virk, 2017).

A trend in the swimwear industry is to work with influencers, who has different body types (Radin, 2019). For instance, since 2013 Gabi Gregg the self-proclaimed OG Fat Girl has been working with Swimsuits for All on an inclusive swimwear collaboration, offering sizes 10-26, with cup sizes from D/DD to G/H (Nieves, 2019). Gabi Gregg pays more attention on non-model size women (Feitelberg, 2017). The reason therefore is to spread a body positive message to consumers and have different influencers who consumers can relate to (Radin, 2019). Body positive content on social media is intended to make women feel better about their appearance (The conversation, 2019).

The Social media influencer market is set to be worth \$10 billion by 2020 (Ismail, 2018). Brands love social media influencers because they can create trends and encourage their followers to buy products they promote. (Influencer marketing hub, 2019) The influencer marketplace can be split into four categories namely mega-influencers, macro-influencers, micro-influencers and nano-influencers (Ismail, 2018).

Nano influencers are a new type of influencer who influence within their community (Barker, 2018). nano-influencer. Nano influencers ordinary digital citizens, with follower counts as low as 1,000 up to 10,000 and are being courted for their intimacy and real time personalization of a brand (Godwin, 2018). Majority of South African are nano influencers with a social following between 1000 and 5000 (Preston, 2019).

Micro influencers are the biggest group of influencers on social media that have between 500-10,000 followers (Ifuenz, 2019) and are known for being topic or industry experts (Barker, 2018). Micro influencers have a much smaller reach, they are extremely loyal, they have engaged followers, and will give a brand a nice return on investment if the product fits with their audience (Barker, 2018).

The macro influencer have a following between 100,000 and 1 million and obtained their fame from the internet through blogging, going viral or being a social media star (Ismail, 2018). Macro influencers has the highest topical relevance on the spectrum, as they tend to focus on a specific category like lifestyle, fashion, business or fitness (Ifuenz, 2019)

The highest in the pecking order of social media influencers are mega-influencers, the ones to reach if the brand wants to be recognized globally (Barker, 2018). Mega-influencers are mega famous people, in other words celebrities with a following of more than 1 million and are often used as spokesmodels for products (Ifuenz, 2019). South Africa has only 120 influencers with a following of 1 million or more (Preston, 2019).

Influencer marketing is one of the most sustainable methods to build brand awareness, increase conversations, or establish brand authority (Brand 24, 2019). More advantages of influencer marketing is that it will increase a business sales and influencers build relationships, trust and credibility with their fans (Huff, 2017; Brand 24, 2019). Disadvantages is that the wrong influencers can be detrimental, mistakes from influencers can hurt the brand's reputation badly (Brown, 2019), influencers post low-quality content (Hashimoto, 2018) and the uncertainty of the results the follower will bring (Home business, 2019).

This research study will focus on the mega influencer and the effect that the mega influencers have on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry, so that swimwear companies can benefit through the research and identify the positive effect mega influencers have.

2.2.2 Mega Influencers

Mega influencers are known as celebrities (Marketing Schools org, 2019). The term celebrity refers to an individual who is known to the public such as actors, sport figures, entertainers and others because of his or her achievement in areas other than that of the product endorsed (Marketing Schools org, 2019). Mega influencers are used to advertise a product from such a platform through which consumers can associate themselves with the brand value from the perspective of the celebrity personnel (Hoekman, 2019).

Mega influencers evolved in the 20th Century with people leisurely following the activities of famous actors, musicians, and professional athletes (Ehrhardt, 2017). In many ways, celebrities-initiated trends (Ell, 2018).

Mega influencer marketing is a common practice adopted by companies throughout the world (Khan, 2018). So often celebrities are used as influencers by being the faces of products in order to globally market and advertise them (Trendchaser, 2017). According to Khan (2018) consumers idealize mega influencers and perceive the brands to be of high quality which are advertised by mega influencers. After the consumers use these brands, they consider themselves like the mega influencers whom they have been idealizing (Trendchaser, 2017; Khan, 2014; Rantanen, 2017).

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) there are four types of celebrity appeals. Celebrities can be used in testimonials, in endorsements, can be an actor in an advertisement to represent the brand and can be a spokesperson or influencer for a period of time (Schiffman & Kunak, 2010). **Celebrity testimonials** is the celebrities themselves vouching for the product by giving testimonials about it (MBA Skool, 2019). **Celebrity endorsement** is using a famous person's image to sell products or services by focusing on the person's money, popularity, or fame to promote the products or services (Business Dictionary, 2019). A **celebrity spokesperson** or influencer is a celebrity or a well-known and respected individual who serves as a regular advocate of a cause or product and, over time, whose name becomes associated with the advocated item (Business Dictionary, 2019). The **celebrity appeal** applicable to this study is the spokesperson and influencer.

Empirical evidence was found by Friedman and Friedman in 1979 that, the use of mega influencers in advertisements would lead to greater believability, a more favorable evaluation of the product and advertisement, and a significantly more positive purchase intention (Patel, et al., 2013).

Swimwear companies that have used celebrities as influencers are Love and Lemons associated with Taylor Swift, Lisa Fernandez associated with Selena Gomez and Stella McCartney associated with Queen B (Creul, 2016). Figure 6 is an example of successful use of a mega influencer, it took less than two weeks for Aerie's pink super scoop one piece swimsuit with the high cut cheekier booty to sell out after British model Iskra Lawrence posted a photo of herself in it to her millions of Instagram followers (Ell, 2018).

Brand ambassadors and social media influencers are taking over the swimwear industry and turning Instagram into a virtual catalog for consumers to share style ideas and search for new ones across multiple labels (Ell, 2018). Retailers have embraced the positive body image movement and steered away from using traditional models (Mediakix, 2019). Mega influencers are leaders who generate conversations, drive engagement, and set trends amongst a receptive audience, and this positions them well to partner with brands on sponsored content (Mediakix, 2019).

2.2.3 Consumer Purchasing Behavior

The IGI Global (2019) defines consumer purchasing behaviour as the decision-making process of consumers wherein they choose from the multiple products and varieties available in order to meet their needs, minimize costs and maximize satisfaction. The behavior is reflective of consumers preferences, nature and budget constraints (IGI Global, 2019).

The importance of knowing and understanding consumer behavior in modern marketing is vital (Barkman, 2018) so that the business knows how the consumer is going to act toward a product or service when it is introduced to the target market (Bhasin, 2018). Every time a customer makes a purchase, they go through a certain thought process (Johnson, 2016). The customer buying decision process describes the entire journey of the customer before they buy your product (Kanchan, 2019). There are six stages to the consumer buying process and purchase is just one of those steps (Jones, 2014). The six steps in the consumer buying process is illustrated in Figure 7, the stages are problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Johnson, 2016).

In the problem recognition stage the customer have reason to believe that what they want or how they perceive themselves or a situation is different from the reality of where they actually are (Jones, 2014). Once the consumer has identified his need, the quest to satisfy his hunger of information begins (Valysys Media, 2019). The evaluation stage is also known as the scanning stage, where the consumer starts to evaluate whether to move ahead with the purchase or not (Valysys Media, 2019). Purchase decision is the next stage where the consumer has explored multiple options and decides to move forward with the purchase or not (Jones, 2014). In the purchase stage the consumer decided to purchase the product or service and the conversation is complete (Valysys Media, 2019). The last stage is the consumer buying process is the post-purchase evaluation, where the consumer decides whether he/she is happy with the purchase decision that was made or not (Valysys Media, 2019).

In a previously conducted study, analysis showed that influencer marketing has a positive influence in the customer buying behaviors and customers were motivated to purchase a product used by a celebrity or idol (Shenjaya, et al., 2016). Influencer advertisements effect customer buying behavior to purchase a product rather than non- celebrity advertisements, was concluded in a study by Khan(2014). 86% of women use social media for purchasing advise and over half of women make purchases due to influencer posts (Knighitley, 2019).

The AIDA model helps you to strategize how and when to communicate with your audience, during a different stage of the path to purchase (tags & talezz, 2017). The AIDA model and how it can be used by mega influencers to effect consumer purchasing behavior is illustrated below:

In stage one and two in the consumer buying process, the problem recognition and information search stage, the AIDA model phase one can be used which is to grab the attention of consumers for example, Maria is going on a summer holiday and needs a bikini is the problem recognition phase. She then goes on to the Instagram to look at pictures of swimwear and search swimwear companies. A that specializes in custom design and make of bikinis has an advert on Instagram about the special service the company offers. It's a custom made one of a kind bikini specifically made to fit their consumers perfectly. This advert grabbed the attention of Maria.

In stage three of the consumer buying process (Johnson, 2016), consumers are evaluating alternatives needs to spark interest in the consumer by using phase two of the AIDA model for example, a swimwear company makes use of a celebrity or mega influencer in the advertisement someone that Maria idolizes and this sparks interest in Maria to consider purchasing a swimsuit from the company.

In stage 4 of the consumer buying process (Jones, 2014), consumers are in the purchase decision stage. The AIDA model can now be used to create desire amongst the consumer as a persuasion tool to make the purchase decision and have an action statement. An example is for mega influencers to make a video of have a quote saying on the advertisement of why the influencer likes the brand and swimwear, and swimwear companies can add free shipping on the advertisement as their call to action saying. The AIDA model can only be used up and to the purchase is made (Johnson, 2016)

In stage 5 and 6 of the consumer buying process, consumers make or don't make the purchase (Johnson, 2016) and if the decision was made to purchase the product consumers decide whether they are satisfied with the product.

2.3 Literature summary

Influencers in social media has a positive effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers. Consumers are more likely to buy a product when recommended by influencers. Influencer advertising is a growing market and is expected to be worth billions by next year. There are four types of influencers: Mega influencer, Macro influencer, Micro influencer and nano influencer.

Mega influencers are also known as celebrities and is a main concept in this study. Mega influencers have a reach of around 1 million people and have been used successfully in the past to influence consumers to purchase a product in the swimwear industry. Influencer campaigns have also been unsuccessful due to the fact that unrealistic images of the perfect body shape was used in advertisements. The Fat OG Girl is an example of a positive body image, and she uses different size models that people can relate to. Thus, mega influencers have a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior if used correctly.

Consumer purchasing behavior was explained through the use of the consumer buying process. Purchase is one stage in the buying process. Consumers are more likely to purchase a product when influenced by a celebrity. The AIDA model can be implemented to effectively use influencer advertising throughout the consumer buying process, to enhance consumers to buy a product or service.

2.4 Conceptualization

The key concepts relevant to this study have been refined and defined below:

- **Influencer**
An influencer is a social media user that can have anywhere from several hundred to several million followers (Swan, 2018). An influencer is an individual who has the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of his/her authority, knowledge, position or relationship with his/her audience (Influencer marketing hub, 2019).
- **Social media influencers**
A Social Media Influencer is a user on social media who has established credibility in a specific industry. A social media influencer has access to a large audience and can persuade others by virtue of their authenticity and reach (Pixlee, 2019).
- **Influencer Marketing**
According to multiple sources influencer marketing is the process of identifying, researching, engaging and supporting the key industry leaders to drive brand message and awareness to a specific market of consumers (Pixlee, 2019; Traack, 2019; Cobain, 2017).
- **Mega Influencer**
Mega influencers are celebrities, whether it be an actor/actress, singer or internet personality, and they usually have at least one million followers or subscribers on at least one social media platform (Barker, 2018).
- **Consumer**
According to the business dictionary (2019) a consumer is defined as an end user, and not necessarily a purchase, in the distribution chain of good service. For example, young children are the end users of toys, but their parents buy them. Therefore, in the market for toys, the buyer and consumer are often different people (Market business news, 2019).
- **Consumer Purchasing behavior**
Kotler and Keller (2011) state that consumer buying behavior is the study of the ways of buying and disposing of goods, services, ideas or experiences by the individuals, groups and organizations in order to satisfy their needs and wants. The ways how the customers choose their products and services can be extremely important for manufacturers as well as service providers as this provides them with competitive advantage over its competitors in several aspects (Kotler & Keller, 2011).

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- The swimwear industry

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) swimwear is clothes that a person wears while swimming or bathing (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019) and an industry can be defined as the companies and activities involved in the process of producing good for sale, especially in a factory or special area (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Thus, the swimwear industry can be defined as companies that produce swimwear for sale.

3. Research design

3.1 Research Paradigm

The paradigm selected for this research is pragmatism as its aim is to generate useful knowledge for practise (Copenhagen Business School, 2015). Knowledge is not purely of a matter of perspective (Subjectivism) or influenced by power relations within society (Critical) but knowledge is subjective and dependent on practical consequences (Copenhagen Business School, 2015).

The pragmatism paradigm is appropriate for this study as it breaks down the hierarchies between positivist and constructivist ways of knowing in order to look at what is meaningful from both (Baker, 2016). By gaining knowledge through qualitative research from consumers in the swimwear industry, the researcher has a greater understanding of the role mega influencers play in advertising and its effect on the purchasing behaviour of consumers in the swimwear industry. This is the epistemological position of pragmatism.

The research of this study considers reality to be constantly renegotiated, debated and interpreted in light of its usefulness in new unpredictable situations (Salma Patel, 2015). Thus, the reality of the outcome mega influencer advertising has on consumer purchasing behaviour in the swimwear industry is based on the effectiveness of the use of a mega influencer in an advertisement on consumers (Berman, 2017). Therefore, reflecting the ontological position of pragmatism.

Researcher values plays a large role in interpreting results, because the researcher must adopt both objective and subjective points of view (Dudovskiy, 2019). The perceptions of consumers about mega influencer advertisements are all valued as it will give researchers a better understanding, if it has an effect is on the consumers purchasing behaviour or not (Ratenen, 2017). Thus, reflecting the axiological position of pragmatism.

A summary of the relevance of pragmatism is summarised as follows: The researcher conducted research on influencer advertisements and what effect it has on consumers, that will lead the researcher to the understanding of the effect mega influencers have on the purchasing behaviour in terms of the purchase decision making process of consumers.

3.2 Data collection methods

Primary research in this research study was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews and secondary research was conducted through the use of articles, books, journals and previous studies. According to Dexel University (2019) the only structure to an unstructured interview is the one that the researcher provides and because the researcher is timebound. A semi-structured interview is more conversational, and the interviewer is interested in hearing from the participant (Dexel University, 2019). Interviews was held with three participants to gather qualitative data.

Qualitative research is both a method and methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing, and integrating research (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Ultimately, Qualitative research was used in this study to heighten knowledge and in-depth understanding. Although there are many methods of inquiry in qualitative research, the common assumptions are that knowledge is subjective rather than objective and that the researcher learns from the participants in order to understand the meaning of their lives (University of Utah, 2019).

Interviews and focus groups are the most common methods of data collection used in qualitative research (Gill, et al., 2019). Interviews was used as a method for qualitative research. Interviews are useful for getting the story behind participant's experiences (Valenzuela & Shrivatava, 2019)

Interview questions where structured from the sub objectives of the study. As seen in table 1

3.3 Data collection process

All three interviews was held in a boardroom at Sparkle Bikini in Centurion after getting the necessary approval. A consent form was signed by Sparkle Bikini as written approval to use the business premises for the interviews This environment eliminated any external noise that may have occurred if held at other places like a coffee shop. A consent form was sent via email to all participants and a letter to explain what the study was about. The consent form was signed and sent back by the participant before the interviewer. An appointment was then made with each of the participants. The interview was held and information was gathered and analysed.

3.4 Data analysis methods

After, the researcher collected qualitative data through the interviews, the researcher compared and contrasted the findings when interpreting the work. Qualitative research can give the reader a broader understanding of the research subject (Celano, 2019).

Qualitative data analysis works a little differently from quantitative data (Bhatia, 2018), primarily because qualitative data is made up of words, observations, images, and even symbols (DeFranzo, 2014; Bhatia, 2018). The advantages of qualitative research is that subject materials can be evaluated with greater detail, it is based on human experiences and observations and it is an open-ended process which generate conclusions with more depth and accuracy (Vittana, 2019). The disadvantage of qualitative research is that the research is highly subjective, mining data gathered by qualitative research can be time consuming and qualitative research creates findings that are valuable, but difficult to present (Vittana, 2019).

There are several methods available to analyse qualitative research and the most common ones according to Bhatia (2018) are content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis and the grounded theory.

Narrative analyses involves the reformulation of stories presented by respondents taking into account context of each case and different experiences of each respondent (Dudovskiy, 2019) and will be used in this research study to analyse data gathered from the 3 interviews. Illustrated in appendix 2 is the questions of the interview. The questions are semi structured and open-ended in depth.

3.4 Population

Population is defined as a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific query (Explorable, 2019). Population can be divided into two groups namely the target population and the accessible population (Hubbard, 2019).

Target population

The entire group of people about which information is wanted is the target population (Hubbard, 2019). For the purpose of this study women of South Africa is the target population.

Accessible population

The accessible population is who the researcher can actually study (Hubbard, 2019). The researcher lives in Centurion area and have access to people in the Gauteng area. The researcher will have 3 interviews from different areas in Gauteng. The interviewees will be filtered by asking them whether they wear swimwear, if the person does the interviewer can continue with the interview. If not the researcher will find another participant who does wear swimwear.

The primary target market is women as a whole, from the age of 18 and up. The characteristics of the primary target population is healthy, happy, fit, active, energetic, self-conscience women who enjoy shopping as determined by qualitative research gathered through interviews.

3.5 Sampling

Practically it is not possible for a researcher to approach all the individuals in a population for the purpose of data collection (Top hat, 2019) and for that reason we must select a representative sample from the population of interest for observation and analysis (ER Services, 2019). The unit of analysis will be people, consumers in the swimwear industry who will be referred to as participant in the research study.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a non-probability, convenience sampling would best suit the purpose of this study (Bhat, 2019). Non-probability sampling is carried out by methods of observation and is widely used in qualitative research (Bhat, 2019). Non-probability sampling are the techniques in which the researchers select the samples from the population without randomization.

Convenience sampling is a technique of the non-probability sampling method (Top hat, 2019). Convenience sampling is where the researcher selects the sample from the population at his own convenience (Taherdoost, 2016). Convenience samples are easily available and economical, but it makes systematic errors and may leads to false generalizations (Top hat, 2019).

The sample size of the interviews are 3 people. 3 interviews will be held in the Gauteng region to gather qualitative data. Questions were formed by the researcher by having the goal in mind which is to find out whether mega influencers have an effect on the purchasing behaviour of consumers in the swimwear industry.

As seen in table 1, the interview questions where based on the sub objective in this study and divided into 4 themes:

- Theme 1: Mega influencers effect on consumers
- Theme 2: Social media influencers
- Theme 3: Relationship with influencers and the environment

There were 8 questions in the questionnaire each divided under a different theme and interviews was recorded using a cell phone voice recorder.

4. Findings and interpretation

4.1 Introduction to findings and interpretation

Findings were interpreted, related to literature and or theory and evaluated in context of the primary and secondary research questions. As previously stated the data was analysed using a narrative analyses that involves the reformulation of stories presented by respondents taking into account context of each case and different experiences of each respondent (Dudovski, 2019).

Ritchie and Lewis (2013) suggest that when interpreting and analysing data, the qualitative researcher may engage in defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of phenomena, creating typologies, finding associations with data, providing explanations or developing strategies.

The process undertaken was firstly, to read through the transcripts and get familiar with the data. Secondly, the researcher organised and reduced data into smaller chunks by dividing it into themes to address objectives as illustrated in table 1. Finally, questions are discussed, interpreted and related to literature and research questions.

Theme 1: Mega influencers effect on consumers

All the participants agree that the background and the woman used in swimwear advertisement have an influence on their purchasing behaviour, but they do not purchase the bikini to look like the influencer in the advertisement. Participants purchase the swimwear to look and feel good in their own bodies. Participant 2 says that the model and the background has an influence on whether she will buy the bikini. If the bikini is advertised with a beach setting or at a place where she will typically wear the bikini she will buy it. Participant 2 will also be more likely to purchase a bikini if the model wears the bikini well and it is a bikini that is to her liking. The major aim of advertising is to impact on buying behaviour; however, this impact about brand is changed or strengthened frequently through people's memories. Memories about the brand are formed by associations that are related to brand name in consumer mind (Haider & Shakib, 2017). A good quality advertisement is likely to influence consumers into buying that product while a poor quality advertisement will do the opposite. Swimwear companies should frequently advertise good quality adverts that consumers can relate to in order to positively influence the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

When it comes to women in the media, there's no question: sex sells. The imagery we see, whether on billboards, on TV, in the pages of magazines, or elsewhere all create the perception that you're not enough if you're not slim with voluminous hair, flawless skin, and a perfect smile; if you're not willing to bare it all and tempt your audience with your female form. And nobody's a bigger culprit of this than the advertising industry (Cooper, 2016). As seen in Interview 1 and Interview 3, the participants agree that there is a stereotype of how woman should look like. Participant 1 says that there is a stereotype that woman should be skinny and well build to wear

a bikini and to be showcased on magazines and social media. Participants were raised that they are beautiful no matter what body size they and that women should care and look after themselves the best that they can, because that too makes a beautiful woman. A trend in the swimwear industry is to work with influencers, who has different body types (Radin, 2019)

For decades companies focused their advertising around the ideal, thin female body and use it as a primary form of the visual message, under the assumption that thinness sells, whereas fatness does not (Mcgregor, 2017). Non-professional models with diverse body types are used in recent campaigns (Mcgregor, 2017). Here are some examples:

1. Lane Bryant: I'm no Angel

Lingerie campaigns starred plus-size models telling the camera that they're no angels and sending a message that all women are sexy (Mcgregor, 2017). The ads were a direct dig at the Victoria's Secret 'Perfect Body' campaign with its very slim 'Angels' as models, as seen in figure 8.

2. Aerie: #aeriereal

As seen in figure 9 Aerie launched a campaign in 2015 using women with different body sizes and they even went for photoshop free photos. Two years after that they also introduced a new fit guide where shoppers can see how a particular bra look on models with various body type (Mcgregor, 2017).

Based on the given answers of participants and literature it can be assumed that influencers used in advertising campaigns will have a positive effect on consumers, if it is someone the consumer can relate to and not a body perfect image that make consumers feel bad about themselves. The participant of interview 2 and 3 do not purchase a bikini to resemble the model in the picture of the advertisement, but the participant of interview 1 does buy swimwear to resemble the model in the picture, but does not have a high expectation that she will look the same.

Theme 2: Social media influencers

Online social media platforms create online communities for interacting with followers (Gaber, et al., 2019). 2 participants follow bikini companies on Instagram and one participant does not but all off the participants and have gone onto these companies' websites and purchased from them. Conversion is a key element in a social media strategy (Kim, 2019), if businesses want to turn lookers into buyers through advertising. Social media has an effect on the purchasing behaviour of consumers. Consumers see an advertisement or product that they like in a social media platform and they can directly go on to the brands website to purchase a product.

Customers read reviews before making purchases. The value of working with trusted influencers to try, then review products is especially valuable to brands (Kramer, 2018). Influencer marketing is a reliable and trustworthy marketing tool and it can be a game changer when understood, monitored and accessed accurately in regards to return on investment (Preston, 2019). When it comes to influencer marketing, over half of women made purchases due to influencer posts with Facebook and Instagram being the preferred platforms (Knightley, 2019). People trust people more than they trust brands and more than they trust marketers. According to the interviews the opinion of influencers on social media is trusted by all participants and the participants will make a purchase based on the opinion of an influencer and the participants own liking. Participant 1 will make a purchase on a bikini if the bikini is comfortable, beautiful and in their price range. Participant 2 trust the opinion of influencers and will purchase a bikini if the bikini falls in their type of style and the bikini is in their price range. The best influencers are honest, know and respect their audience, don't lie about products just to make money, and can deliver real value for both brands and the audience of friends and followers. Trust is key. Digital Marketing Institute says that 49% of consumers depend on influencer recommendations (Nicholson, 2019).

Theme 3: Relationship with influencers and the environment

At the personal level, consumer behaviour is influenced by various shades of likes, dislikes, priorities, morals and values (iResearch Services, 2018). Based on findings the people and environment around the participants have an impact on their bikini purchasing decision. If the bikini is popular amongst consumers the participants will buy it. Participants all agree that in the end their willingness to buy a bikini is based on whether they feel comfortable and beautiful in the bikini. The primary influential group consisting of family members, classmates, immediate relatives and the secondary influential group consisting of neighbours and acquaintances are seen have greater influence on the purchasing decisions of a consumer (iResearch Services, 2018). Thus, not only does influencers have an effect on the buying behaviour of consumers but consumers primary influential group also has an effect as well. This can be a study in the future, of the effect the primary influential group has on the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

Mega influencers have an effect on the purchasing behaviour of all the participants of this study. Ultimately, brands that want to work with ambassadors will need to do what they've always done. They'll have to move with the times and follow the eyeballs and the attention. And they'll have to stay relevant (Britton, 2018).

According to interview 2, mega influencers has an effect on their purchasing behaviour and if the influencer looks good in the bikini it would convince the participant to buy it. Participant 1 agree with participant 1 and adds that if a celebrity or influencer is willing to associate themselves with a product or with a brand it must be worth it. It's a simple psychological effect that consumers feel more sympathetic towards a brand, if their products are promoted by a celebrity they admire or relate to (Zoovu, 2016). Subconsciously people believe that purchasing a product that's promoted by a celebrity they admire, will allow them to emulate the celebrity's desired traits or attract similar people into their lives (Zoovu, 2016). They will associate the celebrities' success, beauty, athletic skill etc. with a particular product (Brown, 2019).

Research Objectives, Problem and Questions addressed

Main objective:

"To determine the positive role of mega influencers on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry."

Research Questions:

1. Does the mega social media influencer have an effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry?

After conducting secondary research and primary research through interviews and interpreting findings through a narrative analysis, it was found that mega influencers has a positive effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry.

2. Does the following of mega social media influencers effect the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry?

Making use of models in marketing has a positive effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry. Consumers trust the opinion of influencers and believe influencers will only associate themselves with a brand if it's worth it.

3. used in a marketing campaign effect the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry?

Although thin flawless models are used to advertise most lingerie and swimwear brands, it does not effect whether consumers purchase a product or not. Consumers do not make a purchase to look the same as the model in the advertisement, but because consumers want to feel confident in their own skin and it is a product that of their own liking.

Research problem solved:

As previously mentioned, the research problem is that mega influencers are expensive, and the thin model ideal is used in advertising that makes women feel insecure about the way they look. After conducting interviews it was found that mega influences have a positive effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers. Mega influencers come in all shapes and sizes and consumers follow influencers that they trust and can relate to. Based on the findings of the research mega influencers can be used by swimwear companies to influence their consumers to make a purchase.

Implications of Findings for future practices

Research implications suggest how the findings may be important for policy, practice, theory and subsequent research (Sachdev, 2017). The primary objective of this study was to explore the positive effect mega influencers have on consumer purchasing behaviour. After analyzing and interpreting the research findings, it became clear that consumers were positively influenced to make a purchase by mega influencers. Therefore, the implications of the findings include: developing trust between influencers and consumers, establishing a sense of community, actively engaging with customers, get positive feelings about the use of different shape models.

Through the pursuit of mega influencer advertising, swimwear companies have successfully develop a relationship of trust between consumers and mega influencers. As previously mentioned in findings, participants trust the opinion of mega influencers, because they believe they are getting an honest opinion about a product and mega influencers won't bind themselves with a product if it was not worth it. The implication of this trustworthy relationship can easily and forever be broken when a consumer has a disappointed experience with a swimwear brand and it is not as good quality as consumers expected it to be based on an opinion of mega influencers. After the consumers use these brands, they consider themselves like the mega influencers whom they have been idealizing (Trendchaser, 2017; Khan, 2014; Rantanen, 2017)

Furthermore, mega influencers establish a sense of community amongst consumers and are actively engaging with consumers. Consumers follow mega influencers on social that they can relate to or inspire consumers. Social media is a way for consumers, in particular those of younger demographics, to engage and build intimate connections with the celebrities they follow (Zoovu, 2016). Mega influencers have already formed their own community around them, the people that follow and engage with them. The implication of mega influencers establishing a sense of community amongst consumers is that swimwear companies can benefit thereof and communicate a message through mega influencers that will be spread through the community. Because mega influencers are actively engaging with consumers, the intended advertising message can be shared instantly to the community the mega influencer engage with.

Continuing, the use of mega influencers as a marketing strategy to influence consumer purchasing behaviour has a positive feeling of different size models being used in advertising. Magazines have a major influence on their concept of what a perfect body shape should look like (Suggett, 2019) and the thin body ideal dominating today's media (Belul & Tran, 2017). A trend in the swimwear industry is to work with influencers, who have different body types (Radin, 2019). Body positive content on social media is intended to make women feel better about their appearance (The conversation, 2019). This implication allows consumers to be influenced by influencers that they can relate to, that may have the same style, body type or consumers feel inspired by them.

Contribution to swimwear companies

This research study facilitated understanding regarding the effect of mega influencers on the purchasing behaviour of consumers using swimwear companies as a case study. It has been identified through findings that mega influencers cultivate trust and nurture consumers' willingness to buy products. Thus, the use of mega influencers as advertisement indeed affects the consumers' purchasing behaviour, thereby addressing the primary research question.

Firstly, the research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on mega influencers and the consumers' purchase decision. Secondly, the research can be extended into further studies regarding the effect that consumers' primary influential group has on consumers' purchasing decision. Finally, the research contributes to swimwear companies' marketing strategy as this research empowers swimwear companies with information that can be leveraged to further benefit the company or swimwear brand in the future.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are suggested for brands that use mega influencers as an advertising tactic:

- Implement mega influencers to create awareness amongst consumers and create a community that can actively be engaged with.
- Use mega influencers to develop credible associations amongst consumers to benefit from greater brand commitment.
- Utilize mega influencers to deepen a trustworthy relationship with the brand and gain customer loyalty.
- Employ mega influencers to spread positive word-of-mouth amongst consumers.
- Use mega influencers as a tool to drive consumer purchasing.

5. Validity, reliability and/ or trustworthiness

The Foundation of good research and of good decision making a good practice is the trustworthiness of data used to make decisions (Eldridge, 2019). Thus, when data cannot be trusted as gathered and analyzed by the researcher of this study, good decisions cannot be made, and the researcher must see through that the data is trustworthy. The researcher made sure the research data is trustworthy by overlooking that the data collected was captured correctly in the questionnaire and that the participants in both the questionnaire and the interviews are part of the research population.

Reliability is defined as the consistency or repeatability of test results and is otherwise described as repeatability or objectivity (Bolarinwa, 2015; Eldridge, 2019). The researcher in this study ensured that the data captured is reliable. This can be done by ensuring that the questionnaire has consistency. For example, the same question with an expected same answer can be asked differently. the degree to which an individual's responses on a survey would stay the same over time is also a sign of reliability (Bolarinwa, 2015).

The fact that a test has trustworthiness and reliability does not mean that the study is valid (Eldridge, 2019). The purpose of data validation is to find out, as far as possible, whether the data collection was done as per the pre-set standards and without any bias (Bhatia, 2018). According to Eldridge (2019) validity can be classified as either logical or statistical in nature and can be divided into three types namely the content-related validity, criterion-related validity and construct related validity. A drafted questionnaire should always be ready for establishing validity (Bolarinwa, 2015). The validity of the questionnaire for the interview can be established by using a panel of experts to explore the theoretical construct of the questionnaires (Price, et al., 2019). In this research study the researcher made use of the campus ethics committee to get ethical clearance before the researcher proceeded with data collection.

6. Anticipated contribution

The proposed research offers span across a number of different areas. This offers a unique opportunity to produce contributions on a number of different fields and disciplines. Mega influencers can be used to advertise and talk about any product or service. Main contribution was to prove that mega influencer advertising are effective and that mega influencers contribute to purchasing behavior of consumers. Achieving the long-term objectives of the proposed research ultimately will:

- Main contribution was to prove that mega social media influencers are effective and that they contribute to purchasing behavior of consumers
- Lead to an enhanced understanding of the role that mega influencers play in persuading consumers to make a purchase of a product or service.

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- Improve the assumptions that the thin model ideal is the best way to market a products or service.
 - Provide a foundation for effective mega influencer marketing by using different size models, realistic size models everyday people can relate to.
 - Lead to a better understanding of the consumer buying process and the effect influencer marketing has on the purchasing behavior of the consumer.
 - Increase sales of businesses by encouraging them to make use of mega influencers within marketing campaigns.

7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are critical. Ethics are the norms and standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong (Grand Canyon University, 2019). The ethical considerations for this research study are as follows:

- One of the most important ethical considerations is the human rights. The questionnaire must be overlooked and approved by the campus committee before the research can proceed to oversee that no human rights are violated and for the safety of the researcher themselves.
- The consent form for the research questionnaire had to be explained the purpose of the study and then be signed by each participant in the study. Refer to appendix 5 for the consent form that was used to collect data for this study. As seen in appendix 5, the participant will be kept anonymous for the study and their identity will be protected.
- An indemnity form was also signed by the researcher at the end of this study, stating that the collected data is correct and the researcher's own work. Thus, there will be no plagiarism throughout this study.
- Secondary research used throughout the study was correctly reference according to the Harvard style of referencing.

8. Limitations

Research Limitations that can occur through this study is:

- Implementation of data collection method.
There is a great chance that the nature of implementation of data collection method is flawed, because the researcher does not have extensive experience in primary data collection.
- Sample size
The sample may be too small. A more in depth study can be done with more participants in the interviews.
- Lack of previous research in the research area.
A lack of data or of reliable data about the research topic.

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- Measure used to collect data

After completing the interpretation of the findings, the researcher discovered that the way in which the researcher gathered data inhibited the ability to conduct a thorough analysis of the results. Other data collection methods that may be better.

9. Conclusion

An exploration study of mega influencers and the effect mega influencers have on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry was conducted. There are many brands on the market and buyers have a large choice of products to choose from, which makes the buyers decision journey more complex and one of the ways influencers are used, is to convince consumers to buy a product. Mega influencers can be really expensive and the research study will test whether mega influencers are worth investing in as a marketing tactic to convince consumers to purchase a product.

Swimwear companies use celebrities and models as influencers in advertising campaigns and will therefore be used as a case study to address the research purpose and problem of this study. The research problem is that mega influencers are expensive, and the thin model ideal is used in advertising that makes women feel insecure about the way they look. This study will conclude whether mega influencers are worth investing in as a marketing tactic to positively effect the purchasing behaviour of consumers

Practically it is not possible for a researcher to approach all the individuals in a population for the purpose of data collection (Top hat, 2019) and for that reason the researcher chose a sample of 3 people to conduct interviews with. Research was conducted through qualitative research approach. 3 Interviews where held with women who wear swimwear. Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth questions.

Thereafter, findings where interpreted it was proven that mega influencers have a positive effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers in the swimwear industry. Findings were interpreted and analyzed using a narrative analyses. Narrative analyses involves the reformulation of stories presented by respondents taking into account context of each case and different experiences of each respondent (Dudovskiy, 2019) Findings where coherent with the literature found on previous conducted.

This research study can be used to conduct further studies in the future based on influencers and consumer behaviour. The main contribution was to prove that mega social media influencers are effective and that they contribute to purchasing behavior of consumers. The research study lead to an enhanced understanding of the role that mega influencers play in persuading consumers to make a purchase of a product or service. The research study also improved the assumptions that the thin model ideal is the best way to market a products or service. The study also provided a foundation for effective mega influencer marketing by using different size models, realistic size models everyday people can relate to. And lastly the research can lead increase sales of businesses by encouraging them to make use of mega influencers within marketing campaigns. Based on the findings of the research study the main objective was met and that was to prove that mega influencers has a positive effect of the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

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11. Figures

Figure 1: Santa used as a influencer in 1932 (Mechem, 2018).



Figure 2: Santa currently used as a influencer (Bauck, 2018).



Figure 3: A brief history of influencer advertising in a timeline (Ehrhardt, 2017).

A brief history of

INFLUENCE

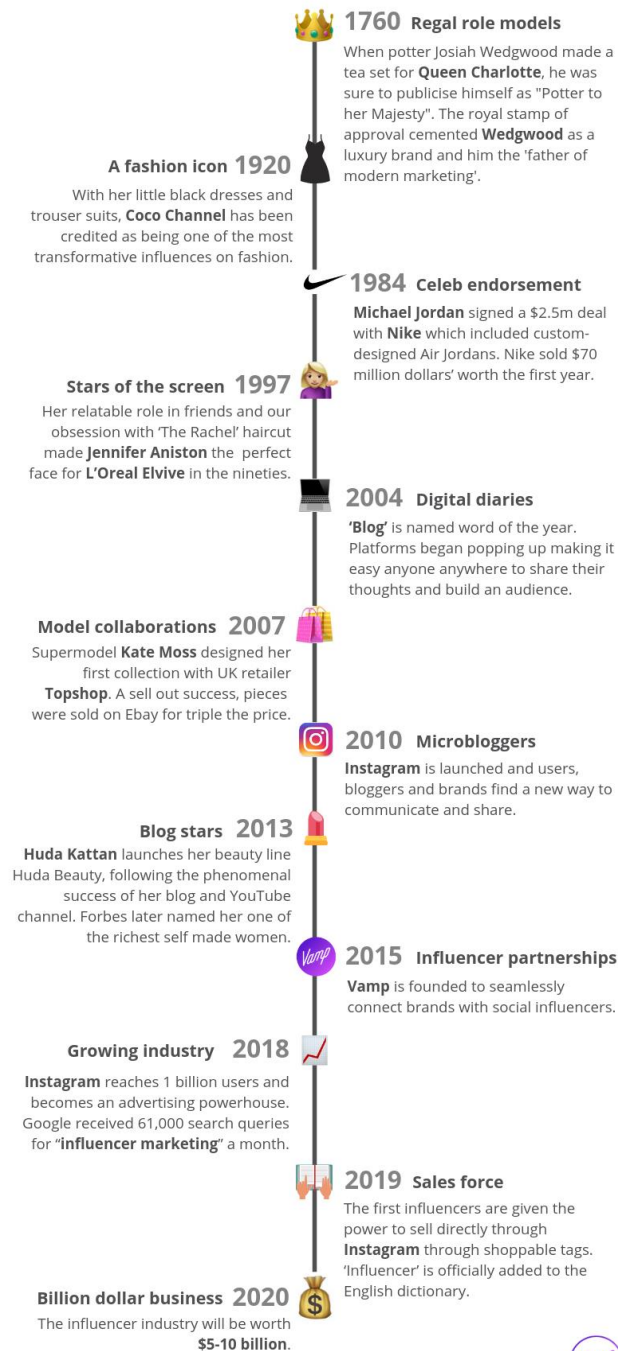


Figure 4: Campaign of the perfect body by Victoria secret (Luxen, 2014).



Figure 5: AIDA Model (Corporate Finance Institute, 2019).

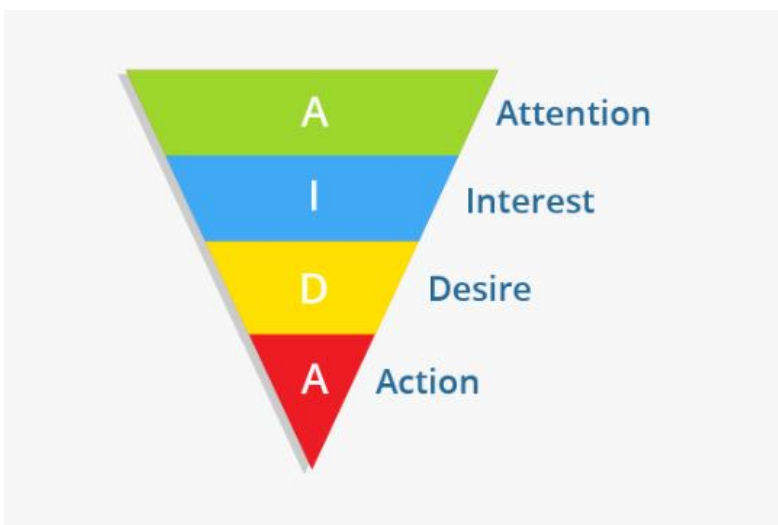


Figure 6: British model Iskra Lawrence (Ell, 2018).



Figure 7: The consumer buying process (Jones, 2014).

The Consumer Buying Process



www.shanepatrickjones.com

Figure 8: Lane Bryant: I'm no Angel



Figure 9: Aerie: #aeriereal



12. Tables

Table1: Table of related themes questions and research objectives of the study

Themes	Interview questions	Research Objectives
Theme 1: Mega influencers effect on consumers	Question 2, Question 3, Question 4, Question 6	Sub Objective 2, 3
Theme 2: Social media influencers	Question 1, Question 7	Sub Objective 1,2,3
Theme 4: Relationship with influencers and the environment	Question 5, Question 7	Sub Objective 1

13. Appendixes

Appendix 1 : Interview questions

1. DO YOU FOLLOW VICTORIA'S SECRET, HUNKEMÖLLER AND/OR TRIANGL OR ANY OTHER SWIMWEAR BRAND ON INSTAGRAM? AND
HAVE YOU EVER VISITED THEIR WEBSITE AND/OR BOUGHT SOMETHING FROM THESE COMPANIES?
2. TO WHICH EXTENT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE PRODUCT COMPARED TO THE WOMAN/WOMEN AND THE BACKGROUND ON PICTURES SWIMWEAR COMPANIES USE IN ADVERTISING ?
3. IS THERE A STEREOTYPE FOR A GOOD-LOOKING WOMAN? WHERE DOES THIS IMAGE COME FROM? IS IT PERHAPS HOW YOU WERE RAISED AS A GIRL?
4. DO YOU BUY THE PRODUCTS TO BE ABLE TO RESEMBLE THE WOMAN/WOMEN ON THE PICTURES?
5. DOES THE PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENT AROUND YOU HAVE AN IMPACT ON YOUR DECISION TO PURCHASE A BIKINI?
6. WHAT FEELING IS IT THAT MAKES YOU WILLING TO BUY A BIKINI IN THE END?
7. DO YOU TRUST THE OPINION OF INFLUENCERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA? AND WILL YOU PURCHASE A SWIMSUIT BASED ON THE OPINION OF AN INFLUENCER.
8. DO MEGA INFLUENCERS OR CELEBRITIES HAVE AN EFFECT ON YOU PURCHASING A PRODUCT?

Appendix 2: Transcript 1

Transcript 1

Interview questions

Question 1

Interviewer: “Do you follow Victoria’s secret, Hunkemöller and/or Triangl or any other swimwear brand on Instagram? And have you ever visited their website and/or bought something from these companies?”

Interviewee: “No, I do not follow any swimwear brand on Instagram, but I have visited their website before and uhh, yes, I have bought from here and overseas.”

Question 2

Interviewer: “To which extent do you think about the product compared to the woman/women and the background on pictures swimwear companies use in advertising?”

Interviewee: “The background that is used on advertising is ideal and, uhh the advertisement would not attract my attention if it was not perfect and the background wasn’t associated with summer.”

Question 3

Interviewer: “Is there a stereotype for a good-looking woman? Where does this image come from? Is it perhaps how you were raised as a girl?”

Interviewee: “We were raised that only girls with thin skinny bodies can wear bikinis... And, well, that was the only stereotype that can wear bikinis. The perception is that bigger bodies cannot wear a bikini.”

Question 4

Interviewer: “Do you buy the products to be able to resemble the woman/women on the pictures?”

Interviewee: “I hope that it would resemble the model in the picture, but it never does.”

Question 5

Interviewer: “Does the people and environment around you have an impact on your decision to purchase a bikini?”

Interviewee: “Yes, off course...people are very cruel. And you always think of how other people would see you and judge you.”

Question 6

Interviewer: “What feeling is it that makes you willing to buy a bikini in the end?”

Interviewee: “If the bikini is comfortable, beautiful and in my price range I will buy it.”

Question 7

Interviewer: “Do you trust the opinion of influencers on social media? And will you purchase a swimsuit based on the opinion of an influencer.”

Interviewee: “Yes, I will try the bikini to see it for myself and make my own opinion on whether I like it and will recommend anyone else to buy it or not.”

Question 8

Interviewer: “Do mega influencers or celebrities have an effect on you purchasing a product?”

Interviewee: “Yes, it has a huge impact on my purchasing because, uhm, if a celebrity or influencer is willing to be associated with a product/brand it must be worth it.”

Appendix 3: Transcript 2

Interview questions

Question 1

Interviewer: Do you follow Victoria's Secret, Hunkemöller and/or Triangl or any other swimwear brand on Instagram? And have you ever visited their website and/or bought something from these companies?

Interviewee: “Yes I do follow various bikini brands on Instagram and um, I have gone on to these companies website to..purchase a bikini.”

Question 2

Interviewer: “To which extent do you think about the product compared to the woman/women and the background on pictures swimwear companies use in advertising?”

Interviewee: “It definitely has an influence if, uhh like the background if an advert has a beach type of background it could convince me to buy a bikini. The beach is possibly the place where I can see myself wearing the bikini. And I also think of the woman on the advert. If it's a good-looking woman it would influence my purchase decision as well, but I don't want to look like the woman or celebrity in the advertisement. I just want to look and feel good in my own body.”

Question 3

Interviewer: “Is there a stereotype for a good-looking woman? Where does this image come from? Is it perhaps how you were raised as a girl?”

Interviewee: “Yes, there has been a stereotype for how woman should look. The stereotype is that woman should be skinny and well build. It comes from the woman which is showcased on magazines and on social media. No, i have been raised that you are beautiful no matter what size you are.”

Question 4

Interviewer: “Do you buy the products to be able to resemble the woman/women on the pictures?”

Interviewee: “No, I buy it in order to feel good and confident in my own body.”

Question 5

Interviewer: “Does the people and environment around you have an impact on your decision to purchase a bikini?”

Interviewee: “Yes, if there is a lot of people wearing that bikini I would purchase it. If I am in an environment where you need to fit in by wearing something that is popular it will influence my decision of the purchase.”

Question 6

Interviewer: “What feeling is it that makes you willing to buy a bikini in the end?”

Interviewee: “The feeling of feeling beautiful in my own body and being confident.”

Question 7

Interviewer: “Do you trust the opinion of influencers on social media? And will you purchase a swimsuit based on the opinion of an influencer.”

Interviewee: “Yes, if the bikini falls in my type of style then I will definitely purchase it.”

Question 8

Interviewer: “Do mega influencers or celebrities have an effect on you purchasing a product?”

Interviewee: “Yes, they do have an influence on my purchase of a product. If a celebrity looks good in a bikini it would convince me to buy it.”

Appendix 4: Transcript 3

Interview questions

Question 1

Interviewer: “Do you follow Victoria’s secret, Hunkemöller and/or Triangl or any other swimwear brand on Instagram? And have you ever visited their website and/or bought something from these companies?”

Interviewee: “Yes, a brand a can quickly think of and that pops up first is Bacon Bikinis. I was actually one of their first Bacon Babes that did shoot for them and I received quite a lot of bikinis from them at that stage so I didn’t had to purchase anything but I’ve made recent purchases from their website

Question 2

Interviewer: “To which extent do you think about the product compared to the woman/women and the background on pictures swimwear companies use in advertising?”

Interviewee: “The women and background play a role in how the products, swimwear is promoted to the public. If I model with a thin figure is used for promotion, the bikini will fit perfect and that’s the ‘picture’ the public will see. A model on the beach will look much more appealing than a model against a wall. The picture that is formed and promoted to the public will let consumers buy that bikini if they see the beach rather than seeing a blank wall.”

Question 3

Interviewer: “Is there a stereotype for a good-looking woman? Where does this image come from? Is it perhaps how you were raised as a girl?”

Interviewee: “Yes I believe there is a stereotype for a good looking woman. An example for where this can possibly come from is Miss SA in general. Normally the women who win miss SA will be good looking and well taken care of or a business woman wearing a fitted skirt and blazer with high heels and a bun. I was raised to always take care of myself and look my best wherever I can. I want people to say that she takes good care of herself that’s all

Question 4

Interviewer: “Do you buy the products to be able to resemble the woman/women on the pictures?”

Interviewee: “No I never buy the products to resemble the woman in the picture. .”

Question 5

Interviewer: “Does the people and environment around you have an impact on your decision to purchase a bikini?”

Interviewee: “Sometimes. When it comes to something I need to wear, I know that people, particularly girls, will have something to say if a top is a bit too open and revealing but it can actually be a really stunning top but something different and then it’s actually not even that bad. So yes definitely thinking of what some people might think.”

Question 6

Interviewer: “What feeling is it that makes you willing to buy a bikini in the end?”

Interviewee: “Will I feel comfortable in it? If yes then I buy it, if no, then I don’t”

Question 7

Interviewer: “Do you trust the opinion of influencers on social media? And will you purchase a swimsuit based on the opinion of an influencer.”

Interviewee: “I’m taking myself as an example here. I promote a lot of things and I’m honest. If I like something, I will say it. Now you do get people only saying things so that they can look good or be good for the brand. But I want people to believe me so who am I not to believe anyone else? I do trust other influencers and will probably buy something that they give an honest opinion on, if I like it of course.

Question 8

Interviewer: “Do mega influencers or celebrities have an effect on you purchasing a product?”

Interviewee: “Yes they do.”

Appendix 5: Consent form

To whom it may concern,

My name is Chanel Erwee and I am a student at Vega Pretoria. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Amalia van Schalkwyk around *An exploration of the effect mega influencers have on the purchasing behaviour of consumers in the swimwear industry*. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the relation between mega influencer advertising and consumer purchasing behaviour in a South African context using swimwear companies as the case study.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because (insert reason). If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to give you a semi-structured questionnaire that will take about 15 minutes of your time that you can fill out.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular questions in the questionnaire.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Do I have to participate in the study?

Your inclusion in this study is purely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so. Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all questionnaires, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Chanel Erwee

0609625361

chanel.erwee@gmail.com

I _____, on the date _____ of year _____ hereby state that I am willing to be a participant in this study and that the research study and questionnaire was explained to me.

Signature

Appendix 6: Permission form

Permission form

To whom it may concern,

My name is Chanel Erwee and I am a student at Vega Pretoria. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Amalia van Schalkwyk around *an exploration of the effect mega influencers have on the purchasing behaviour of consumers in the swimwear industry*. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the relation between mega influencer advertising and consumer purchasing behaviour in a South African context using swimwear companies as the case study.

I would like to ask you permission to use Sparkle Bikini's office to conduct interviews of my study.

Student name: Chanel Erwee

Location: Sparkle Bikini

Address: 309 Chris Hougard street, Wierdapark, Centurion

I (name) _____ hereby give my consent that Chanel Erwee, student of vega
can use Sparkle Bikini's Office to conduct interviews for this study on (date) _____ at
this (time) _____.

Date

Signature