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MASTER'S THESIS

ATTITUDES OF YOUNG SLOVENIAN CONSUMERS TOWARDS INFLUENCER CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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IZJAVA O AVTORSTVU

Podpisana **Eva Kern**, študentka Ekonomske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, avtorica predloženega dela z naslovom **Odnos mladih slovenskih potrošnikov do vsebin vplivnežev na družbenih omrežjih**, pripravljenega v sodelovanju s svetovalko **doc. Tamaro Pavasović Trošt, PhD**

IZJAVLJAM

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eWOM – Electronic Word–Of–Mouth

Gen Y – Generation Y

Gen Z – Generation Z

BSC – Brand–Sponsored Content

SMP – Social Media Platform

SNA – Social Network Advertising

UGC – User–Generated Content

US – United States

INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is not changing only the creation, deciphering and sharing of information, but it is also reshaping how brands are thinking about their markets and people who define those (Solis, 2009). Since consumers were recognized as possible co–creators of digital advertising content, marketers started maximizing advertising effectiveness through developed partnerships with newly established digital opinion leaders. A research conducted by Celebrity Intelligence (2017, p. 13) among 270 marketing specialists in 2017 revealed that 92% of respondents agree that promotion through digital influencers is very important or critical. Strong investment returns encouraged marketers to include influencer marketing spending in their media budgets, while 70% of marketers plan to increase their influencer marketing budgets in 2018 (WhoSay, 2018). Digital influencer marketing performs more effectively than comparable forms of media and is expected to surpass other types of digital advertising such as display ads or e–mail marketing in spending (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2018; WhoSay, 2018). Globally, the majority of marketers believe influencer marketing became the fastest–growing online acquisition method (Tomoson, 2015).

Likewise various scholars recognized the importance of influencer marketing, because they observed how digital opinion leaders are able to impact consumers' purchase decision–making patterns and brand attitudes (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017; Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Jin & Phua, 2014; Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014; Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Furthermore, it has been examined how public conversations in the digital space are able to generate positive word–of–mouth (Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester & Palazon, 2016; Abendroth & Heyman, 2011; Yeh & Choi, 2011). The increasing prominence of influencer value augmented the interest not only to analyze positive consequences of such advertising models but also to focus on how consumers perceive and decode such digital content (Serazio, 2015, p. 612).

"Marketing at its best is the influencing of opinion through compelling content," (Weber, 2009, p. xiv). Weber (2009) argues marketers need to be aware to develop content, which is frequently consumed and engaged with in order to establish a valuable dialogue with their consumers. Credible social media influencers have a particular approach towards building a relationship between consumers and the company logo by their storytelling. They adapt the message in order to humanize the company (Bell, 2012, p. 34). At the same time, social media provides its users with the power to spread the word in the matter of a few clicks (Yeh

& Choi, 2011, p. 145). Moreover, by enhancing interactions between peers and followers it became the main medium for influencer content (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Interestingly, according to research among generational cohorts, young consumers show the highest level of trust in the majority of online and mobile advertising formats (Nielsen, 2015).

To leverage this opportunity, advertisers took influencer marketing as their newest buzzword. Only in 2017 the term "influencer marketing" increased by 325% in Google searches (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2018). Namely, customers became the transmitters of brand conversation (Weber, 2009, p. 102), since influence is distributed among various creators of digital content. Therefore, user–generated content grew to be a very influential tool for getting messages across to younger audiences and getting accepted at the same time (Smith, 2012; Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011). Since social media became a ubiquitous form of social identification and stimulation of shared consumption behaviours, a better understanding of how consumers feel, behave and engage with brand–sponsored influencer content is needed (Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013, p. 44; Nielsen, 2015).

The main purpose of this thesis is to identify attitudes and behaviour of generation Y and generation Z in Slovenia towards brand–sponsored influencer content. Data on consumer behaviour and attitudes toward brand–sponsored content of social media influencers conducted in the Slovenian market is very limited. The majority of discussions behind roundtables and on marketing pitches are based on foreign research data or industry–specific experience. This thesis aims to better understand digital content marketing practices from the perception of the Slovenian consumer, while providing empirical research that can help practitioners and theorists reflect on influencer marketing perceptions based on Slovenian–conducted data. Therefore, the goals of this thesis are understanding the process that leads young Slovenian consumers to follow certain influencer content and engage in electronic word–of–mouth; discovering whether brand–sponsored influencer content consequentially affects brand awareness, affinity, loyalty and purchase intent of consumers; and ascertaining the differences between generation Y and generation Z in their attitudes towards influencer marketing. The findings are additionally going to be compared with the results of obtainable research conducted in foreign markets.

Therefore, the following research questions are addressed throughout this thesis: (1) What drives young Slovenian consumers to follow influencer content?, (2) What type of content are young Slovenian consumers influenced by?, (3) How are young Slovenian consumers engaging with BSC of influencers?, (4) How does active engagement in eWOM affect brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase of young Slovenian consumers?,

and (5) Do Slovenian generation Y and generation Z consumers have different attitudes or behaviour towards BSC of influencers?

The thesis first explains the digital concepts necessary in order to build a foundation for the empirical part of the research. Based on existing academic research, it examines the rise of digital marketing and its advertising challenges, the role of social media in online branding, and discusses how consumers became the new transmitters of brand conversation. The second chapter highlights the developing practice of influencer marketing and explains why it evolved to be of such a big importance to marketers nowadays. The third chapter describes the characteristics of young consumers who were classified under generation Y and generation Z. The research framework and methodology of the thesis are presented in the fourth chapter, while the results of both the qualitative as well as quantitative research are presented in the analysis and results section in the fifth chapter. This is finally followed by a brief discussion which provides theoretical and practical implications of the research. Specifically, this thesis is useful for scholars and practitioners to ascertain how young Slovenian consumers perceive their digital advertising efforts via influencers, while more importantly, decoding the drivers and motivations behind their following decisions. With the help of this data, the justification and selection of influencer partnerships will be apparent.

1   IMPORTANT DIGITAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONCEPTS

The development of the digital space has among other things affected consumer behaviour, their attitudes and perceptions, their information selection and consequently the generation of new marketing techniques adopted to these changes. Weber (2009, p. 81) argues that the approach in the digital world is somehow different from traditional marketing, because digital channels are disintermediated by the online spheres of influence. Likewise, organisational boundaries have become much more fluid to the extent that consumers started co–creating and sustaining the company's competitive advantage (Halliday, 2016, p. 143).

In order to provide a holistic literature overview, this thesis first turns to determine the key digital concepts that this research is based on. Firstly, it defines the concept of digital marketing and discusses the effectiveness and attitudes towards digital advertising. Secondly, the role of social media is defined through the importance, which social network platforms have to consumers and through the development of online communities. Thirdly, the value of user–generated content (hereinafter: UGC) is reviewed, since brand conversation in the digital world has induced a transmission from companies to consumers.

1.1 The rise of digital marketing and its advertising challenges

Digital marketing is the practice of promoting products and services using digital distribution channels via computers, mobile phones, smart phones, or other digital devices (Smith, 2012, p. 86). The development of the digital era began in the late 1980s with a focus on HTML and site building, continued with the evolvement of browsers and chat rooms in the mid–1990s, and matured as rich media and broadband at the beginning of 2000s (Weber, 2009, p. 13–15). The rapid growth of the internet became critical to effective marketing. Today a variety of digital advertising techniques are in use, including banners, paid search, streaming media, social networking sites, email marketing, podcasts, YouTube videos, blogs and UGC especially connected to influencer marketing (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011).

The digital world is stealing attention away from newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and other traditional channels, where marketers were used to reach their audiences (Weber, 2009, p. 182). "Nearly every commercial during the Super Bowl is designed to send viewers to a digital destination" (Weber, 2009, p. 13). Traditional advertising on television, magazines, newspapers and radio is experiencing a downfall, whereas the web is rapidly becoming the most important marketing medium. Therefore, companies started investing into compelling content, development of online environments, which customers would visit and began actively participating in the social digital sphere (Weber, 2009, p. 15).

Consequently, marketing budgets became more diffused. In 2017, advertisers worldwide already spent more on digital than traditional TV. Digital ad spending reached $209 billion, accounting for 42% of the market, whereas TV advertising expenditure stayed at $178 billion, which accounts for 35% of the worldwide marketing budget (Kafka & Molla, 2017). This trend is believed to be increasing at least until 2020 (Forte, 2018; Kafka & Molla, 2017). Researchers at eMarketer forecasted that the media advertising spending share in the United States (hereinafter: US) in 2020 will allocate approximately 45% to digital marketing, 33% to TV advertising, 11% to print, 6% to radio, 3.4% to out–of–home and the remaining 1.6% to directories (eMarketer inc, 2016a).

In 2017, marketers in Slovenia spent 47.2 million € on digital advertising, which means investments in digital marketing compared to previous year increased by 18% (Marketing magazin, 2018). Digital advertising represents 25% of the average advertising budget (IAB Slovenija, 2017), a fairly smaller share compared to the trends abroad. 30% of the budget is allocated to video advertising, since video content is considered to be the most influential advertising format on digital channels (Marketing magazin, 2018). The research showed, that digital investments in classical banner formats dropped, whereas investments in social

media advertising and programmatic buy increased significantly (Struna, 2018; Marketing magazin, 2018).

Digital marketing is regarded as the most appropriate and influential means of connecting with younger consumers because they are keen to interact through social media and exchange information and opinions about products with their peers (Smith, 2012; Nielsen, 2015). Marketers who want to capitalize on the purchase habits of younger consumers are shifting their budgets towards social media and investing in content utilization through brand influencers and blog–related content (Forte, 2018). Various digital channels opened the possibility to meet consumers on their turf, not by talking at them, but by establishing a two–way communication. Since brands are actively searching to obtain direct feedback from consumers, marketing in the digital space elaborated into a dialogue (Weber, 2009, p. 191).

1.1.1 Effectiveness of digital marketing

The use of digital marketing became important to marketers because it permits them to generate dialogue with consumers more efficiently while spending substantially less compared to advertising via traditional channels (Weber, 2009, p. 36). "The **ease of creating, publishing and sharing content** with those with similar interests has had a definite effect on the nature of message dissemination" (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, p. 593). This holds for professional and UGC equally. Weber (2009, p. 36) argues that the role of marketing stayed the same, despite the shift in message distribution. Namely, marketers still need to define target audiences, communicate with prospective customers, build loyalty and brand awareness and capitalize on similar goals.

Nevertheless, the marketing techniques that were successful on traditional media in the past will become less effective in the future. The digital world is **inherently measurable** (Weber, 2009, p. 111) and today marketers adapt their digital strategies according to big data analysis and consumer engagement metrics. Research has found online reviews and personalized messages to be the most influential (Smith, 2012), and strategies are shifting away from the declining appreciation of pop–up ads and YouTube pre–rolls towards content marketing, including influencer marketing, towards artificial intelligence, social media marketing and marketing automation (Statista, 2018a; see Figure 1). Since big data holds valuable information about consumers and measures their behaviour while they are spending time on the internet, it is a sensible technique to invest in.

Digital advertising is sometimes seen as irritating, intrusive or ineffective, especially when consumers are inundated with ads (Smith, 2012, p. 87). Luckily, digital tools enable **precise**

targeting opportunities, which diminish the described situation. Traditionally, companies have segmented their consumers according to basic demographics like age, gender, education and income, because those were the most easily identifiable (Weber, 2009, p. 37). Nowadays, digital marketing gives the opportunity to segment consumers additionally by their behaviour, attitudes, and interests. The more precise the targeted audiences are defined, the more effective marketing can be (Weber, 2009, p. 70).

Figure 1: Most effective digital marketing techniques according to marketers worldwide in 2018 (%)
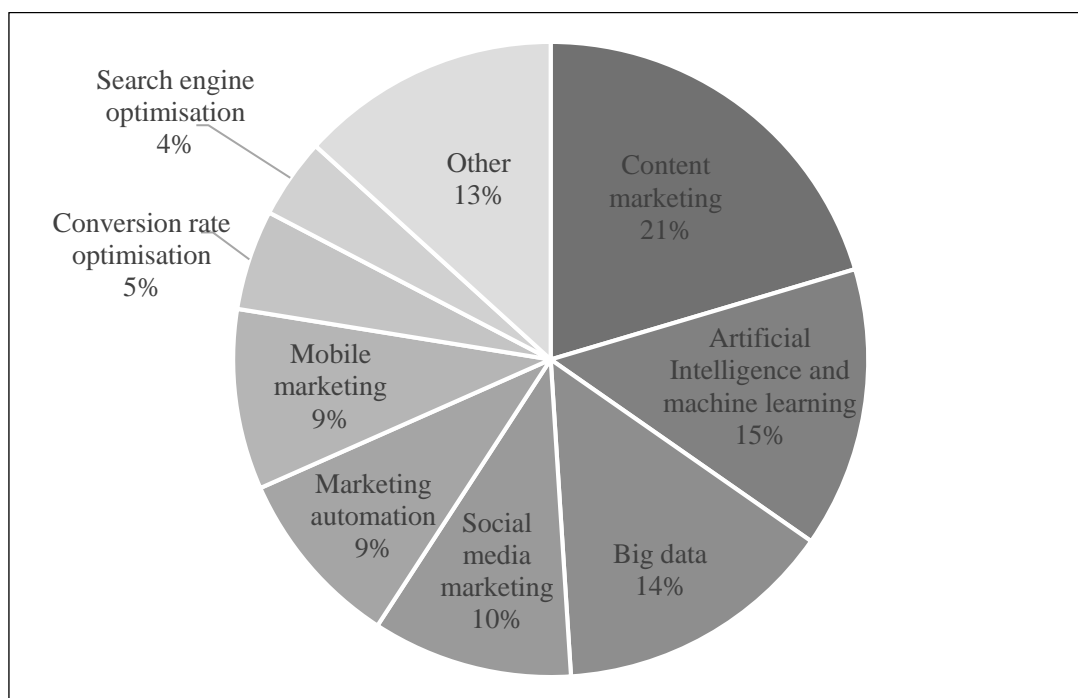
Source: adapted from Statista (2018a).

1.1.2   Attitudes towards digital advertising

The internet not only became the most frequently used media, but it is also seen as the defining element of younger generations (Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Attmaann, 2011; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2011; Valentine & Powers, 2013). Millennials' use of the internet is very goal–oriented, because it is their source of entertainment, information, news and social interaction (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2011, p. 667). Since digital advertising in the form of banner, pop–up and pre–roll ads distract and irritate consumers when **interfering with their goal–directed behaviours** (Talyor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011, p. 263); they are distinguished

as annoying (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016, p. 166). If the advertisement is perceived as **invasive**, it can cause consumers to adopt a negative view of the brand that is being advertised, as well as of the website advertising the irritating ads (Smith, 2012, p. 89). This is seen as the real cost of advertising (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011, p. 260; Valentine & Powers, 2013).

On the other hand, the Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising survey (Nielsen, 2015), which polled 30.000 online respondents in 60 countries, found out that generation Y shows the highest level of trust in online and mobile advertising (especially social media and search engine results) among the surveyed cohorts. Therefore, young consumers do not resent advertising. Smith (2012, p. 87) explains millennials simply favour advertisements that are less intrusive. Weber (2009, p. 38) argues, "marketing is not an irritation or an interruption if it relates to something customers want". Particularly, there is a difference between being interrupted by digital advertising and actively seeking information (Weber, 2009, p. 224). Therefore, researchers recommend marketers to use the digital space for what it is – an easy access to information, products and services (Nielsen, 2015) – it is a platform of **convenience**. Cheap costs, fast service, high quality and a great experience are all important factors, which influence the purchase intent of younger generations (Duffet, 2015, p. 518).

Digital advertising should focus on mobile formats and capture consumers' attention on places, where they are already seeking for information, ideas (Nielsen, 2015) or just spending time. Social media platforms (hereinafter: SMP) deliver content which is usually consistent with consumers' motivations. They are more likely to ascribe positive attributes toward advertising, which also provide some entertainment or informational and social value (Talyor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011). **Personalisation** is an advertising technique that tailors the message according to the preferences of the target audience, because consumers are said to be more submissive on advertisements, when they are relevant to their lifestyle. This is partly the reason, why marketers shifted their attention towards content marketing and social network advertising (hereinafter: SNA) (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016).

1.2   The role of social media in online branding

Social media has introduced a new organisational framework for online communities, which has changed the balance of power between customers and brands (Wong, 2014). They are member–based online forums, where users with common interests or connections can share thoughts, and opinions (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011; Weber, 2009, p. 195). SMPs are communication channels, mainly comprised of UGC, which became useful for transmission of brand–related information as well (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 81; Weber, 2009). The

terminology utilized differs: Boyd and Ellison (2008), Duffet (2015) and Taylor, Lewin and Strutton talk about SNS (social network sites) and SNA, whereas other academics use OSN (online social networks) (Yeh & Choi, 2011; Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015).

Approximately 2.67 billion people or 35% of the global population and 69.8% of all internet users will access a social network regularly in 2018 (eMarketer inc, 2016b). In Slovenia, the use of social media among all consumers is also increasing. Facebook and YouTube are especially trending among consumers (Marketing magazin, 2018). Moreover, generation Y and Z, which are most responsive to digital advertising, became frequent users of Instagram, while the use of Twitter and LinkedIn dropped (Marketing magazin, 2018). The utility of SMPs lies in their influence over coveted demographics (generation Y and generation Z) that have migrated from traditional mass media (Jin & Phua, 2014). Consumers are far more dependent on digital content than they were five years ago (Nielsen, 2015).

Advertisers are advised to capitalize on consumers' skyrocketing usage of social media and meet their target audience, where they search for entertainment, news, information and social interaction (Jin & Phua, 2014; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013; Smith, 2012; Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011; Boyd & Ellison, 2008). SMPs provide **fundamental channels for building consumer–brand relationship**s (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 67). Their nature allows various compelling advertising strategies such as targeted brand building or lead generation campaigns with instant feedback possibilities (Weber, 2009, p. 25–31). Strictly speaking, consumers are enabled to engage and interact by commenting, liking and sharing brand–related content. In such way they voluntarily display their brand preferences (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 47), creating a two–way communication with advertisers. Surely, the development of SMPs has altered the way consumers interact with each other and institutions and marketers can hardly have control over created content and its distribution (Weber, 2009, p. 29). However, companies have adjusted to the ways in which consumers now select, share and assess information (Duffet, 2015, p. 500). Marketing via SMPs became a viable strategy for businesses, no matter the size (Weber, 2009, p. 193).

1.2.1 Social media platforms and their users

SMPs vary greatly in their features and user base (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Usually users need to sign up and construct a profile to become members of the platform. Then they are encouraged to articulate a list of members they want to connect with, browse through connection lists of other members (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211; Chatterjee, 2011, p. 79) and interact, communicate, explore UGC and other information at hand (Weber, 2009, p. 209). Members usually start building presence on their own newsfeeds, sharing content in

the form of photos, videos, links or thoughts and opinions. Most SMPs also enable members to leave messages in their friends' private inbox (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 214). Furthermore, some of the SMPs allow business profiles, where brands, bands, groups, opinion leaders and the like promote their products or services (Erkan & Evans, 2016, p. 48).

Examples of SMPs include **Facebook**, which has become the biggest SMP in the last years with 1.47 billion daily active users (Facebook, 2018) and a successful business model (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). It offers diverse interactive elements in the form of wall newsfeeds, albums, blogs, discussion groups, events, which all encourage generating new relations. Facebook plays an important part in the digital advertising industry, since it proved how advertising on the platform benefits the consumers' purchase intent (Duffet, 2015). **YouTube** is based on video content, which is viewed by consumers for more than 1 billion hours every day. This platform is very popular with younger consumers and already exceeded 1 billion registered users (YouTube, 2018). **Instagram** expects to have 714.4 million users in 2018, which indicates an 18.4% rise compared to previous year, making it the fastest growing SMP at the moment (Enberg, 2018). A simple platform initially developed for uploading instantly taken photos has now emerged to be a brand builder in itself. **Twitter**, attracting 335 million users (Statista, 2018b), is the most known microblogging and micro media tool, which limits messages to a maximum of 280 characters (Watson, 2017) and makes sharing urgent, time–sensitive information easier (Nations, 2017). Tweeting has become a verb and a tweet may contain photos, GIFs, video or links (Twitter.com, 2018). Other SMPs worth mentioning are LinkedIn, Pinterest and Tumblr; however, this research will mainly focus on the aforementioned SMPs.

Communication on those platforms is either **bi–directional** (ex. Facebook) or **unidirectional** (ex. YouTube) (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011, p. 259). Often a bi–directional confirmation of the connection is required (ex. Facebook), however not all SMPs have this requirement (ex. YouTube, Twitter); on some it is optional (ex. Instagram). A bi–directional connection is usually labelled as 'friendship', whereas unidirectional connections are called 'fans' or 'followers' (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 212). The number of fans is essentially unlimited, which allows companies, brands and popular individuals to enlist thousands of followers (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011, p. 259). The number of followers is sometimes an important factor in the decision–making process of whether or not to engage in new partnerships as part of influencer marketing (Booth & Matic, 2011).

Individuals become users out of different motivations, which Taylor, Lewin and Strutton (2011, p. 260) grouped into three factors: (1) structural (killing or filling time), (2) content (information or entertainment value) and (3) socialization factors (to connect with others).

One of the reasons why SMPs have grown in popularity is that consumers perceive them as a reliable source of information. The opinions of connections, which are embedded in the existing networks of the consumer, are perceived as more credible and trustworthy than anonymous reviews, because a bi– or unidirectional connection has been made (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 55–56). Therefore, regardless of the difference in features, SMPs are a useful framework to generate electronic word–of–mouth (hereinafter: eWOM) for effective brand communication (Yeh & Choi, 2011). Marketers use SMPs to build trust and authentic relationships with consumers (Weber, 2009, p. 217). They create and engage in communities built around common interests, which they develop through content, conversation and visual impact, allowing friends and stranger to share their thoughts (Weber, 2009, p. 230). Although ties based on personal friendship are strongest, the connective characteristics of SMPs "allow weak ties to expand their potential influence by extending consumers' personal networks to external communities" (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 53).

1.2.2   Online communities

"The real job of the marketer in the social web is to aggregate customers" (Weber, 2009, p. 15). According to Weber there are two ways to do so: (1) providing compelling content and (2) participating in the public arena. Weber distinguished online communities from social networking communities; however, the lines between both concepts became blurrier in the recent years (Weber, 2009). An **online community** is defined as a social group of people who engage, interact, and develop personal relationships with each other over common interests and passions (Yeh & Choi, 2011, p. 146). Their emergence created platforms for consumers to exchange ideas, views and product related information (Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi, 2014, p. 179). They provide for a vibrant society of like–minded people. Members of a brand community often serve as brand ambassadors and typically disseminate their excitement on other members of the community and beyond (Yeh & Choi, 2011, p. 146).

In the past, online communities strictly existed on specific websites devoted to a distinct purpose (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). With the emergence of influencers, the essence of these communities flourished, shifted, and organized itself around people who sometimes embody a certain brand, and have passion towards a specific topic or interest. Social networking and blogging strengthened the impulse towards sharing and collaboration (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 195), which presents the core of online communities. It initiated conversation and relationships between bloggers and target audiences around similar interests (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, p. 598). Those influencers, who master the community that has voluntarily built

around them, are persuasive and important spokespersons in their areas of expertise, passion, or interests, because they suddenly possess the power to steer opinions (Solis, 2009).

1.3 The transmitters of brand conversation

SMPs transcended the role of the consumer from someone, who merely receives information into an authority, ambassador, critic (Solis, 2009), opinion leader (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 50) and journalist (Weber, 2009, p. 5). Customers became transmitters of brand conversation (Weber, 2009, p. 102), empowered by peer communication practices and the ease of message sharing (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, p. 598). Influential individuals have no editorial constraints, while having access to a wide following community. Their UGC can enhance or diminish products, brand or corporate reputations, because they are heard, read and believed (Weber, 2009, p. 5). Interactivity among SMP users enables dynamic eWOM, which is extremely useful for increasing brand engagement and its relevance (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 50). The control of brand message dissemination has shifted from marketers to consumers (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Suddenly, "everybody has become media" (Weber, 2009, p. 40).

1.3.1   User–generated content

UGC is media content, which has been "created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the internet" (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 82). It is an activity of self–expression through sharing views, opinions and feedbacks and is usually distributed on SMPs (Bahtar & Muda, 2016, p. 341). In social media, every receiver is also a potential sender (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, p. 598). In this fashion, users have become writers, publishers, creators and influencers; because opinions of fellow consumers were proven to have a greater influence on consumers' decision–making than advertisements published by brands (Smith, 2012). UGC is significantly more likely to get recommended (Chatterjee, 2011), because consumers trust the content generated by other users, since they perceive users do not have any commercial interest (Bahtar & Muda, 2016, p. 338).

Bell (2012, p. 34) argues it is no longer a question of B2C or B2B channels, but person–to–person channels. Research has shown that young consumers are keen to interact with others on SMPs, in order to exchange opinions and experiences about products, services, tourist destinations etc. (Chatterjee, 2011; Smith, 2012). Peer judgment and evaluation is valued and trusted more than information provided by organizational sources or traditional media. According to the Nielsen research, 83% of consumers admit they completely or somewhat trust recommendations of friends and family, while 66% say they trust consumer opinions

posted online (Nielsen, 2015). Such eWOM has the potential to influence hundreds of people (Smith, 2012, p. 89) as long as it appears authentic and credible (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010).

1.3.2   Importance of eWOM

eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). It is considered non–commercial and free from manipulation by organisations (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, p. 598), therefore being an important source of consumer information (Grewal, Cline & Davies, 2001). Users can create eWOM intentionally by writing posts with reviews or opinions or unintentionally by displaying their preferences in the form of becoming followers of brands and interacting with their content by liking, commenting or sharing (Erkan & Evans, 2016, p. 48). In this way brand–related information is created and **distributed freely** between two or more consumers (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 47). Marketers are using different strategies to stimulate this interactivity by linking its content to discounts, giveaways and other incentives, which aim at proactivity of endorsements and strengthening sharing practices among consumers (Duffet, 2015, p. 518).

Therefore, eWOM developed into a **key performance indicator** for advertising success (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017). Digital conversations on SMPs have become an emerging marketing factor, especially since bloggers have become opinion leaders, expressing confidence and authority, which makes them a relevant reference point (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, 598). They are able to transform commercial information into cultural stories, which are relevant to their followers (members of their communities) (Jin & Phua, 2014, p. 189). Moreover, eWOM interactions are an antecedent of brand recognition and awareness, because it is easier for consumers to recall a brand, when they interact with it (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015, p. 606). eWOM is also positively related to purchase intentions (Balakrishnan, Dahnili & Yi, 2014, p. 179; Mutum & Wang, 2010, p. 250). According to a McKinsey research, it generates more than twice the sales of paid advertising (Bughin, Doogan & Vetvik, 2010).

No wonder many studies have focused on the drivers of creating positive eWOM, consequences of its effects and measurement techniques (Abendroth & Heyman, 2011; Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015; Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017; Bughin, Doogan & Vetvik, 2010; Grewal, Cline & Davies, 2001; Jin & Phua, 2014; Yeh & Choi, 2011). McKinsey research found that the effect of eWOM can be measured by looking at the volume of messages and the impact, which is affected by the network of distribution,

content, the sender and its motivations (Bughin, Doogan & Vetvik, 2010). The model is presented in Figure 2.

Given that consumers are no homogeneous group and that they have different motivations for engaging in eWOM, strategies for encouraging and increasing eWOM participation should be developed on the basis of appropriate segmentation (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004). Influencers can play multiple roles as brand enthusiasts; however, the degree of engagement in the eWOM process is importantly dependent upon their brand identification and trust of fellow community members (Yeh & Choi, 2011, p. 147).

Figure 2: Effect of eWOM on company brand

Volume	✕	Impact	=	eWOM equity
Few messages		**Network** ➕ *close/trusted* ➖ *large/dispersed* **Message content** ➕ *relevant* ➖ *irrelevant*		Strong equity can be achieved with few messages, but in combination with strong impact.
Many messages		**Sender** ➕ *influential* ➖ *non-influential* **Message source** ➕ *based on experience* ➖ *not based on experience*		
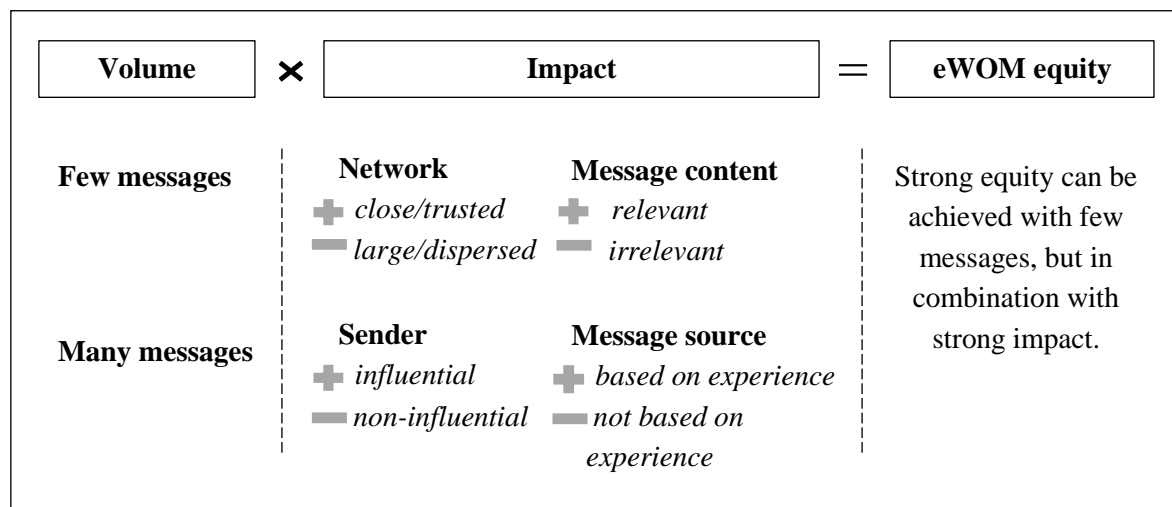
Source: adapted from Bughin, Doogan & Vetvik (2010).

2   THE INFLUENCER MARKETING FUSS

By definition **influencer marketing** is a "non–promotional approach to marketing in which brands focus their efforts on opinion leaders, as opposed to direct target market touchpoints" (Hall, 2016) creating brand–sponsored content (hereinafter BSC). The term "influencer marketing**"** increased by 325% in Google searches over 2017, while the majority of managers around the globe believe it became the fastest–growing online acquisition method of the year (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2018; Tomoson, 2015). The Age of Social Influence survey from Celebrity Intelligence, conducted with 270 marketing specialists, revealed that in 2017, 61% of respondents worked with digital influencers, who represented the largest majority group that brands have worked with for endorsement and commercial opportunities. All respondents believe their social media promotion is proving very effective, whereas 92%

respondents agree that promotion through digital influencers is very important or even critical these days (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017, p. 13).

This means encompassing digital influencer marketing is deemed more important than investing in search or display ads or e–mail marketing (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2018; WhoSay, 2018), because it brings strong returns on investment. A Tomoson study of 125 US marketers disclosed that the average business in US is making $6.50 for each $1 spent on influencer marketing, while the top 13% earn $20 or more (Tomoson, 2015). Respondents of The Age of Social Influence survey found that brands got £17.21 back for every £1 spent. These trends are likely to continue in the future, as roughly two–thirds of marketing departments are looking to increase their budget for influencer marketing over the next year (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; Fastenau, 2018; WhoSay, 2018).

Globally, there has been a lot of excitement in finding creative and successful ways to collaborate with social media influencers. Studies demonstrated different models defining consumers' attitude towards advertising content (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013; Smith, 2012; Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011) and influencers or celebrity endorsers (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017; Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Lueck, 2015; Jin & Phua, 2014; Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014; Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013; Bush, Martin & Bush, 2004). Others examined influential factors for generating positive eWOM (Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester & Palazon, 2016; Abendroth & Heyman, 2011; Yeh & Choi, 2011) or explored the role of social media content in supporting brand activities (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014; Booth & Matic, 2011). Likewise, the buzz echoed in the Slovenian marketing sphere, making it the key topic of the biggest advertising conferences in the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018 (Diggit, 2018; SMK, 2018; SOF, 2018; SEMPL, 2017 etc.).

Since young consumers spend much of their time on SMPs, digital influencer marketing through SMPs emerged to be a powerful tactic to target socially hyperactive Gen Y and Gen Z (Enberg, 2018; Serazio, 2015, p. 609). SMPs appear to be the perfect tool for effectively disseminating information, since digital influencers enjoy wide reach on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, p. 593). The latter especially rises as the primary platform for influencer–brand campaigns (Enberg, 2018). However, marketers believe that digital influence on SMPs is able to provide with much more than promoting messages. Figure 3 explains what marketers define to be advantages of influencer marketing in the future, as found out in a study conducted by Traackr among 102 brand strategists and marketers from leading companies worldwide (Solis, 2017).

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Figure 3: Ten goals of influencer marketing as seen by marketers (%)
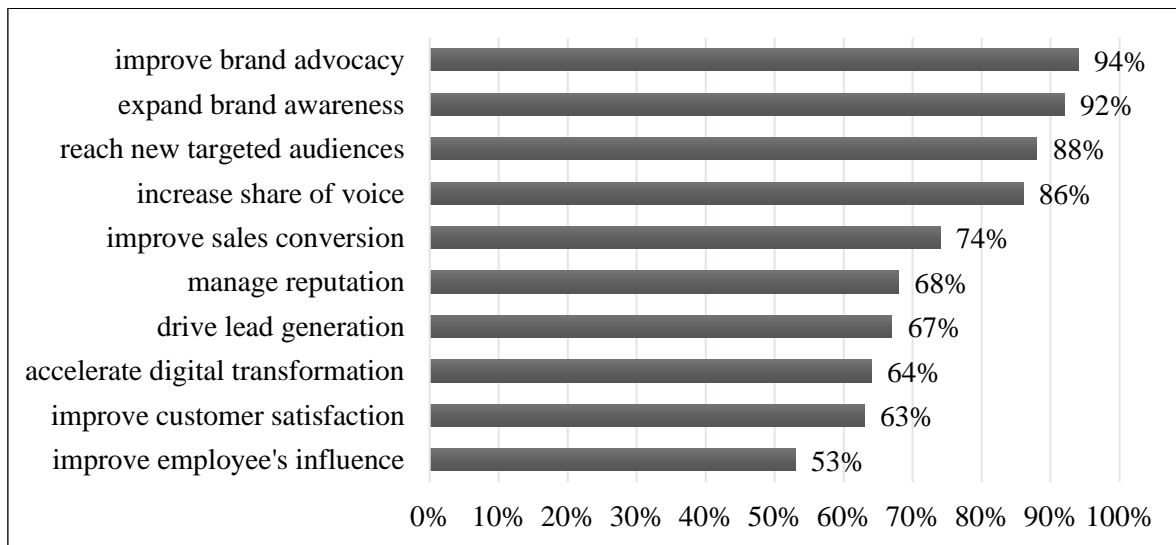
Source: adapted from Solis (2017).

As Solis (2017, p. 2) and Kassoway (2014, p. 12) point out, influence requires continuous relationship management in order to be beneficial in the long run. Extensive business approaches and models have been developed in order to identify those consumers who have the knowledge, ability and motivation to be influential by leading followers in their social environment or online communities (Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013, p. 44).

2.1   Who is an influencer?

"The **digital influencers** that everyone covets are human beings who have built communities where others follow their updates for a variety of personal or professional reasons. The ties that bind are the very premises of relationships. These communities are rich with the exchange of mutual value and social capital" (Solis, 2017, p. 11). According to a study performed by Uzunoglu and Kip (2014, p. 596) practitioners have defined digital influencers as content generators, columnists, opinion leaders, experts/celebrities and a phenomenon of the internet. They are prominent individuals with expertise and knowledge who serve as role models to their group of followers, which exceeds their usual circle of friends (Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013, p. 35–48). Through their individual and social attributes such as leadership ability, ego drive, and independence, they are able to exert direct or indirect influence on their followers (Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013, p. 48).

"Not everyone who claims to be a leader and source of advice in a social group can be a convincing social influencer," argue Langner, Hennigs and Wiedmann (2013, p. 35). Since influencers utilize peer–to–peer influence (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017, p. 17), it is actually their followers who make them influential. Social media users link the key attribute of influencers to advice giving, because they are seen as someone who is likely to give advice and as someone who is reliable enough to be turned to for advice (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011). Moreover, influencers are viewed as verbal, ambitious, smart, productive, and balanced (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011). Weber argues (2009, p. 68) that the personality of the message sender is as important as the message itself. Therefore, it is crucial for marketers to distinguish between social influence leaders and their followers (Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013, p. 44).

When searching for the appropriate influencer to endorse a brand, a number of factors are considered. 85% respondents of the Age of Social Influence Survey believe having a relevant audience or following is the most important factor for enrolling in future partnerships with potential endorsers (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017). Therefore, the criteria always includes the number of followers, because it represents the possible width of the target audience. However, having many followers does not mirror the strength of influence (Wong, 2014). Marketers are therefore advised to focus on quality not quantity of the profiles. Namely, quality can be examined through engagement rates, loyalty of followers and transparency of communication (Erdogan & Baker, 2000; Sassine, 2017). Influence is also driven by expertise and credibility on the expressed subject of interest (Wong, 2014). Moreover, not every influencer is suitable for every partnership. Specifically, marketers need to analyse if the audience of their potential endorser is relevant to their goals and if the personality and communication type of the influencer represents a good fit for the brand (Sassine, 2017).

2.2   Brand–sponsored content

An influencer endorsement is an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (e.g. the influencer) and an entity (e.g. a brand) to use the influencer for the purpose of promoting the entity (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016, p. 644). This is a form of **indirect advertising** (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017). Hall (2016) differentiates between earned influencer marketing, which stems from unpaid or pre–existing relationships on the basis of natural affinity to the brand, and **paid influencer marketing** in the form of BSC. The latter are different from general product review posts in that BSC is created, because it is funded by a partnership with a brand (Hwang & Jeong, 2016, p. 529). Sometimes companies provide influencers also with indirect compensation in the form of free products

(Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014). Effective post interaction creates intimacy between the influencer and follower and redirects the emotional attachment from the influencer towards the promoted brand or product (Lueck, 2015).

Nevertheless, there is a risk of message change and transformation into a negative attitude if the communication process is not constructed strategically (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, p. 598). When sponsorships are disclosed, such advertising recognition can generate distrust (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017, p. 90), ignorance of the influencer content (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017, p. 33) and lead towards lower purchase intention (Duffet, 2015, p. 517). In order to protect consumers from deceptive advertising, state regulators have urged marketers and creators to disclose sponsored posts on SMPs (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017). A sponsored post is likely to be attributed with unfair persuasion motives, however Hwang and Jeong (2016, p. 529) demonstrated that less favourable attitudes can be reduced when influencers emphasize their opinion is honest. Therefore, marketers are carefully evaluating opportunities to depict the appropriate influencer potential to build a community within a branded space successfully (Serazio, 2015, p. 609).

However, some criticism of the true effectiveness of such influencers has been noticed, which mainly arose from communication challenges and the perceived intrusiveness of digital advertising (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014; Smith, 2012). Firstly, should digital advertising in any form impede the person's ability to accomplish a task, it is seen as intrusive and irritating (Smith, 2012, p. 87). As mentioned, consumers use social media for different purposes such as seeking news and information, looking for entertainment or engaging with content of friends (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin; 2013, p. 659–666). Therefore, any advertising content which makes the process of achieving this purpose slower or more confusing, evokes negative attitudes and scepticism toward the advertising claim (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013; Smith, 2012). Secondly, as Mr. Oštir, the Director of Corporate Communciations in Gorenje, recently wrote, influencers diminish their communication standards or dilute the production of ads, making themselves nothing more than a cheap advertising panel (Oštir, 2018). Mr. Oštir is not alone with his frustrations, as many companies feel the pressure to control the brand conversation on social media (Booth & Matic, 2011). 71% of 270 US marketers from surveyed during WhoSay research admit that finding the right influencer for a brand campaign is challenging (WhoSay, 2017).

Mark W. Shaefer, marketing consultant and businessman, named among Forbes magazine's "Power 50" social media influencers, believes that the influence of these people cannot be underestimated, moreover it is "an incredible opportunity to humanize the company" (Bell, 2012, p. 34). Since there is a general belief that people do not like to be targeted by

advertisements (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013; Valentine & Powers, 2012; Bell, 2012; Peterson, 2004), it is understandable that millennials in particular favour ads that are less intrusive (Smith, 2012, p. 87). Therefore, consumers are more sympathetic towards brand content from people who help with their tips and tricks, how to save money, time, or have more fun (Bell, 2012, p. 34). Youth "trust their friends' opinions and hate being ad targets" (Peterson, 2004). Sponsored posts show great resemblance in format and style to content from befriended contacts, which makes the promotional message look less obtrusive (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017, p. 82). This suggests that word–of–mouth buzz is the best advertising (Peterson, 2004).

2.2.1   Content types

As digital technology is improving, the SMP experience is becoming richer and richer (Weber, 2009, p. 198). BSC can be generated in different formats such as blog entries, microblog posts, videos or photos. They usually contain a link to a specifically designed landing page, promoting or selling the product and brand that has been endorsed by the influencer (Mutum & Wang, 2010, p. 252).

The first online journals started appearing in 1994 and developed into blogs, as they are known today. A blog "quickly became both a noun and a verb" (Weber 2009, p. 168). With the evolvement of Twitter the length of blog texts was diminished significantly (Watson, 2017). Instant messaging, also called microblogging, represents an easier and faster communication practice for online users (Nations, 2017). Those messages became mobile convenient and introduced many other benefits, such as the opportunity to create more frequent posts, spending less time to develop and consume individual pieces of content, easing the way of sharing time–sensitive information and more (Nations, 2017).

SMPs allow users to use photo, video and audio with their posts. Recent research showed young consumers, who impose two–thirds of YouTube users, watch YouTube videos more often and longer than any other media (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016, p. 165). The popularity of video content became evident after statistics implied that videos are able to significantly increase brand awareness, reach more targeted audiences, increase favourability of the brand and provide a higher click–through rate (eMarketer inc, 2016c; Halliday, 2016, p. 143; WhoSay, 2017). Videos can be very emotionally persuasive and socially engaging, either by being informative, educational, or simply entertaining (Weber, 2009, p. 194–195).

2.3   Followers through attitudes and behaviour

In order to be successful, marketers need to be not only familiar with the influential blogosphere, but they also need to understand how consumers, who exploit influencer content, think and behave. This understanding will help them reach appropriate target audiences through SMPs (Weber, 2009, p. 38–39). Valentine and Powers (2013, p. 599) argue that the message which would appeal to younger consumers needs to be quick, direct and honest, while Duffet (2015, p. 520) states content needs to be interactive and stimulating in order to have an impact.

While using SMPs, contact and physical evidence between contacts are unavailable, therefore research suggest trust towards community members is a prerequisite that the information exchange between two individuals is successful (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017; Chu & Kim, 2011; Mutum & Wang, 2010; Yeh & Choi, 2011). When recommendations by influencers are perceived to be highly credible, the positive impacts on the consumers are expected to intensify (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2014, p. 82). **Credibility** comprises of trustworthiness (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017), authenticity (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009) and expertise (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015). The digital community values forthrightness and honesty (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 201– 202). If consumers believe a message is biased by monetary gain in some way, its credibility may be downgraded (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014). Expertise is important to the extent that influencers are able to provide their knowledge to their followers in an informative and helpful way (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016, p. 166).

Additionally, **identification** with the influencer plays a significant role in determining their credibility perceptions as well as influencing the persuasive process. It seems that interpersonal connection is more likely to occur between individuals who are alike (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 54). Since time–filling is one of the strongest purposes of using SMPs, followers, consumers seek **entertainment**. Influencers who are able to augment the followers' needs for enjoyment are deemed more popular (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016, p. 166). More importantly, the act of following and tendency for engaging in eWOM is driven by individuals' desire for **sociability** (Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester & Palazon, 2016) and SMPs and digital influencers provide numerous opportunities to expand followers' social circles. Furthermore, Jin and Phua (2014) found that influencers with a **high number of followers** were associated with higher ratings on source credibility compared to endorsers with low number of followers.

The effects of eWOM impact behaviour of followers on different levels (Chatterjee, 2001, p. 129). Positive attitudes towards UGC have been proven to result in an increased intent to purchase the promoted brand or product (Bahta & Muda, 2016; Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi, 2014; Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014), increased brand loyalty (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017, p. 86) and positive affinity and brand awareness (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015; Chatterjee, 2011). **Purchase intention** is "consumers' willingness to buy a given product at a specific time or in a specific situation" (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014, p. 261). **Brand awareness** is a consumer's ability to recognize or recall a specific brand name (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014, p. 260). **Brand loyalty** indicates that a consumer repeats his or her purchases of a specific brand and commits to buy it as a primary choice, even though prices would slightly change (Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi, 2014, p. 178).

Therefore, it is useful to know how followers perceive particular influencers before initiating a campaign. A credible source who potential customers identify with, and who is able to be entertaining and informative, can yield a stronger response in decision–making behaviour as someone without those qualities (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011). Followers do not want to be sold, but they do want news, information and entertainment about things they care about. "And they want it right now" (Weber, 2009, p. 13).

3 MILLENNIALS AND MILLENNIALS ON STEROIDS

Advertising and media seem to be responsible for the seeming coherence of numerous generational cohorts, since they indulge in fragmenting the society into several smaller target audiences or market segments (Serazio, 2015). A 'generation' as a demographic concept is defined as "a product of subjective, collective memory as much as empirical, identifiable history" (Serazio, 2015, p. 600). Each generation believably has certain habits, values, and ways of thinking; they develop their own grammar and media literacies. These characteristics are often reflected in the advertising and media ecology, which is expected to be grasped by the targeted audiences (Serazio, 2015, p. 602). In such a manner, common identities are constituted that companies and brands can benefit from when creating targeted marketing messages for their meaningful subsets (Valentine & Powers, 2013), although generalizations to individuals based on their categorizations should be avoided (Desai & Lele, 2017, p. 806).

"Marketers seek, through new media platforms, to weave brand messages into the 'cultural dialogue' of youth" (Serazio, 2015, p. 608) by developing new or entering existing communities and soliciting self–expression. Thus, influencer marketing has become the new

big advertising trend to reach younger audiences (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017; Bush, Martin & Bush, 2004; Erdogan & Baker, 2000; Fastenau, 2018; Hall, 2016; Langner, Hennings & Wiedmann, 2013; Liu & Brock, 2011). Younger target groups include members of **generation Y** (also called millennials) and **generation Z**. The majority of studies have focused on millennials (Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin & Rumpel, 2011; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Attmann, 2011; Peterson, 2004; Smith, 2012; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013; Valentine & Powers, 2013), whereas generation Z has just started coming of age, so there is less obtainable studies of the respective generational cohort (Forbes Coaches Council, 2018).

Research suggests that age, societal norms, and technology are three primary factors which define a generation (Kane, 2017). Nevertheless, both generational cohorts under consideration have traits in common. Both are keen to interact with others through SMPs, which they also use for exchanging information and opinions about products (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016; Smith, 2012). Word–of–mouth recommendations by peers are trusted above information provided from traditional media or organizational sources (Smith, 2012), since they refuse invasive advertising (Peterson, 2004). They are both savvy smartphone users, since these devices enable them to perform all kinds of activities from almost anywhere (eMarketer inc, 2017). However, some intriguing generational divisions between cohorts X and Y became evident, which will be underlined in this chapter.

3.1   Millennials (Gen Y)

The generation Y is one of the most heavily researched demographic by advertisers, because it is the largest generational group since the baby boomers with the biggest purchasing power at the moment (Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Attmann, 2011; Nielsen, 2015; Smith, 2012). This generational cohort is often identified as the group of individuals born in the 1980s and 1990s (Barbagallo, 2003; Claveria, 2017; Duffet, 2015; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Nielsen, 2015; Serazio, 2015, p. 600; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013, p. 657), inherently growing up on the verge of the new millennium. This research adopts the definition used by Claveria (2017), which seems to be widely supported (Barbagallo, 2003; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Nielsen, 2015; Serazio, 2015; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013) and narrows the members of generation Y to those who were born between 1980 and 1995.

In the literature, generation Y is also referred to as Gen Y, Millennials, Digital Natives (Serazio, 2015), the Net Generation, the Me Generation (Claveria, 2017), Generation @, the Dot.Com Generation (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013, p. 657), the Facebook generation (Duffet, 2015, p. 501) and the Boomerang Kids (Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi, 2014). These

names reflect the fact that this generation has grown up in the age of instant global communication, media saturation, and material excess, armed with a variety of electronic technology (Barbagallo, 2003). Millennials are multimedia multitasking consumers (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013), implying they are using multiple devices at once and simultaneously performing numerous activities; from listening to music, watching short videos, surfing the web for information, instant messaging and checking their emails (eMarketer inc, 2017).

On this ground, the difference between millennials and previous generations naturally rose into a shift of values and consumer preferences (Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Attmaann, 2011). Members of generation Y are more culturally diverse and better travelled than many of their parents or grandparents (Valentine & Powers, 2013, p. 598). They are described as tolerant and trustful (Valentine & Powers, 2013), moral, spiritual, independent, mature, strong–willed, and idealistic (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013, p. 658–666). However, while they tend to be spontaneous and place emphasis on immediacy of information, they are also said to be cynical of the government, suspicious of social security and healthcare, concerned about social and environmental causes, and cynical regarding the objectivity of information (Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Attmaann, 2011; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013, p. 658).

Millennials are a unique and influential consumer group, heavily influenced by technology and the digital world (eMarketer inc, 2017; Valentine & Powers, 2013). They are the first generation that uses digital channels of media more often than traditional media (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013). According to Ipsos MediaCT research (Kassoway, 2014), which surveyed 839 millennial men and women, millennials spend 30% of their time (approximately 5 hours per day) engaged with UGC and frequently use the internet for shopping, news–seeking, entertainment and social networking (Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi, 2014; Smith, 2012). Millennials are seen as marketing mavens (Smith, 2012, p. 86–87), because they are eager to share their opinions, experiences and interests with other consumers via blogs, online reviews, and social media networks (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Since they use a wide variety of digital tools, selecting the appropriate medium to effectively reach the consumers of this cohort has proven challenging (Valentine & Powers, 2013). Marketers are keen on growing their presence in social media, in order to gain feedback and detect insights from this audience, which has been difficult to reach through conventional advertising methods (Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin & Rumpel, 2011, p. 23).

Therefore, millennials are the key target of digital advertising. However, millennials are educated consumers, savvy of finding detailed product information online, and for this reason, expectations of goods and services are higher than ever (eMarketer inc, 2017; Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Attmaann, 2011). The combination of rising incomes and openness

to experimentation with new products and services and the desire for greater connectedness with peers and digital influencers is highly attractive to brands. Barbagallo (2003) argues that value, trend, safety and coolness should become prominent in every advertising offer.

3.2   Millennials on steroids (Gen Z)

There is an absence of consensus on the age limit of the generation following Millenials, or Generation Z. Definitions of various studies about the starting year differ, with some arguing that members of generation Z were born from 1990 onwards (Desai & Lele, 2017), from 1996 onwards (Brauer, 2018; Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; Nielsen, 2015; Özkan & Solmaz, 2017), or from 1998 and 2000 onwards (Kane, 2017). This research adopts the definitions by Özkan and Solmaz (2017) and Claveria (2017), which are consistent with the definition of the generation Y cohort. Namely, people born in year 1996 and beyond are analysed as members of generation Z.

Generation Z or Gen Z acquired the name after the use of the expression 'zapping' (Desai & Lele, 2017, p. 808). The Oxford Dictionary (Wehmeier, 2005, p. 1778) defines this verb as "to use the remote control to change television channels quickly" or "to move, or make sombody/something move, very fast in the direction mentioned". The members of this generation are sometimes also called the Selfie generation (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017), Snapchat Generation, iGen or Millennials on steroids (Claveria, 2017), because the generation tends to exhibit similar beliefs and behaviours to their predecessor, only to be usually more intense (Kane, 2017), instant minded, and having an even faster life rhythm (Desai & Lele, 2017, p. 802). In five to ten years' time, these will be the next dynamic actors of the trade sector (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017, p. 150) and are thus important to be studied.

Typically, Gen Z members were born to older mothers, and live in smaller families (Desai & Lele, 2017, p. 806). The vast majority are still economically dependent on their parents; therefore, they spend less and are more selective when buying a product (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017, p. 151). They lived through the Great Recession and a time of perpetual war and terrorist threats, experienced immense racial and ethnic diversification and the rise of LGTB rights at a very young age (Brauer, 2018). Therefore, they are believed to be very tolerant of diversity, inclusive and open–minded. Gen Z members prize freedom of choice, tend to customize things and are actively searching for ways to have fun (Desai & Lele, 2017, p. 807). They think visually and value design and convenience (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017, p. 151), especially placing more value on speed than accuracy. Therefore, Gen Z is characterized with superficial and divided attention (Desai & Lele, 2017, p. 807).

Growing up in a digitally mature world, where information is available at all times, Gen Z members are actualizing their social lives by streaming and consuming content mostly on their phones (Kane, 2017; Özkan & Solmaz, 2017), desiring immediacy, constant entertainment, and the ability to create and record (Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin & Rumpel, 2011). Their members perceive technology and internet as indispensable goods (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017) and are driven by greater exposure to digital media, where they stay constantly connected with their friends, peers, family and acquaintances (Desai & Lele, 2017, p. 807). However, in terms of social media they are far more sensitive about their privacy and public image compared to their predecessors and are therefore favouring Snapchat, partially because they are able to control their own content distribution (Kane, 2017). Gen Z members are described as demanding consumers. Namely, the Age of Social Influence research (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017) discovered they are the least loyal or trusting of brands and institutions, having more faith in individuals than organisations. 25% of the respondents admitted they have boycotted a brand in the past because they judged it was not align with their moral views (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017, p. 22).

3.3   Key differences

If comparing purchasing power and buying habits, Gen Y's purchasing power is ten times bigger than the current purchasing power of Gen Z, which naturally derives from their economic independence. Consequently, millennials are bigger spenders than their younger counterparts, since they already entered the age of larger financial investments, whereas Gen Z is still schooling (Claveria, 2017). In the Slovenian market, Gen Y was growing up during the independence processes of establishing a new country, while Gen Z does not have any memories of Yugoslavia or the era before Slovenia joined the European Union (hereinafter: EU), which happened in 2004 (Vlada RS, 2018). Moreover, in 1989 the GDP per capita in Slovenia was 5.417€, whereas it increased to 17.000€ until 2009 (Urad vlade RS za komuniciranje, 2010). The connectedness of European countries, easiness of border–crossings and economic relations as well as economic stability is something Slovenian members of Gen Z were born into, while Gen Y was able to observe the development of these processes.

Naturally, because of the difference in their age groups the generations' SMP preferences also differ as well as the way they consume digital content (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017). Almost two–thirds of millennials agree that social media is an important part of their live, while less than half of Gen Z members admit to it (Kane, 2017). Gen Y still prefers Facebook to other SMPs, while the favourite SMP of Gen Z is YouTube (Claveria, 2017). Although

both generations tend to have fast–paced lives, Gen Z is more instant minded and has a drastically shorter attention span (Claveria, 2017), which indicates advertising messages should be even shorter and more direct with this cohort. Gen Y is supposed to be far more brand conscious than Gen Z (Claveria, 2017) and more loyal, whereas Gen Z is highly sceptical of advertising and institutionalised messages (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017). This might indicate that the personification of the advertising narrative will become more important in the upcoming years. Indeed, both generational cohorts favour opportunities to publicize and distribute their work to online audiences (Serazio, 2015, p. 603) and developed positive attitudes toward influencer content (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017, p. 13).

Table 1: Comparison of Gen Y and Gen Z

Generation Y	versus	Generation Z
Gen Y, Millennials, Digital Natives, the Net Generation, Me Generation, Generation @, the Dot.Com Generation, the Boomerang Kids	Nicknames in use	Gen Z, Selfie generation, Snapchat Generation, iGen, Millennials on steroids
1980 – 1995	Born in years	1996 – ongoing
multimedia multitasking, higher attention span	Technology preferences	instant minded, lower attention span
brand conscious	Advertising attitudes	brand sceptical
Facebook	Social media preferences	YouTube

Source: adapted from Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi (2014), Celebrity Intelligence (2017), Claveria (2017), Desai & Lele (2017), Serazio (2015), Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin (2013), Özkan & Solmaz (2017).

In the past, generation Y and Z were often lumped together (Brauer, 2018) because of similarities in their technological background. Indeed, both generational cohorts share many of characteristics, but differ in priorities or content expectations (see Table 1) and behave differently (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin & Rumpel, 2011; Forbes Coaches Council, 2018). This implies the usage of specific marketing approaches for effective targeting (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; Claveria, 2017; eMarketer inc, 2017; Forbes Coaches Council, 2018).

4   RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

After a holistic theoretical overview of the conceptual framework was provided, this research turns to the empirical part of the study. In order to highlight the purpose of the study, first the research objectives and thesis goals will be presented. Next, the hypotheses will be developed with short argumentations based on key academic resources. In order to provide an illustration how the hypotheses are connected, a simple hypotheses model is presented. Afterwards, this chapter turns to the outline of the methodology, explaining the measures and testing methods that were used for the collection and analysis of the primary data.

4.1   Research objectives

The main **purpose** of this master thesis is to identify the attitudes and behaviour of generation Y and generation Z in Slovenia towards BSC of influencers. The **goals** of the thesis therefore are:

(1) to understand the process that leads young Slovenian consumers to follow certain content and engage in eWOM; namely, the drivers of why consumers follow social media influencers, how they are impacted by their content and what type of content they are influenced by,
(2) to discover whether brand awareness, brand affinity, brand loyalty, and the intent to purchase are affected by BSC of influencers,
(3) to examine whether there is a significant difference between the behaviour and attitudes of consumers belonging to the generation Y cohort and consumers belonging to generation Z cohort in the matter of influencer content,
(4) to compare the behaviour and attitudes of consumers in Slovenian market to the results of obtainable research from foreign markets.

These insights aim to help marketers determine which type of content to use with their influencers, how to segment their audience properly on digital channels and how to generate positive eWOM. Finally yet importantly, the findings illuminate influential indicators that can help influencer marketing campaigns to gain momentum and leave a mark in awareness–building or boost the purchase intent of the respective customers. A hypothesis framework was built in order to fulfil the presented goals of research.

4.2   Development of hypotheses

The following research questions derived from established theories on influencer marketing and SNA will be addressed throughout this research:

(1) What drives young Slovenian consumers to follow influencer content?
(2) What type of content are young Slovenian consumers influenced by?
(3) How are young Slovenian consumers engaging with BSC of influencers?
(4) How does active engagement in eWOM affect brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase of young Slovenian consumers?
(5) Do Slovenian generation Y and generation Z consumers have different attitudes or behaviour towards BSC of influencers?

In order to provide useful answers to the set research questions, fourteen hypotheses were developed and grouped together in five categories that relate to the afore–mentioned research questions.

4.2.1   Influencer content following drivers

When marketers are considering their investments in influencer marketing, one of their first tasks is to identify an influencer who is influential on his or her field of interests (Khan, Daud, Ishfay, Amjad, Aljohani, Abbasi & Alowibdi, 2017). In order to identify such influencers, it is important to know what drives consumers to follow certain content at all.

H1: *Credibility of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*

Consumers are more likely to be persuaded when they perceive the influencer to be credible. Firstly, a source is considered credible when the influencer is perceived as **trustworthy** (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017, p. 84; Yeh & Choi, 2011, p. 151). Social media influencers are trusted since they imply peer or even friend ties to consumers (Wong, 2014), because they are often seen as fellow social media users whether they are official brand endorsers or not (Jin & Phua, 2014, p. 183). Therefore, social media reduces anonymity and makes the eWOM information more trustworthy and reliable (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Lueck (2015) claims that BSC in this way seems more natural and believable, because it imitates closeness and friendship. The vast majority of consumers admit they believe consumer opinions and UGC posted online (Nielsen, 2015; Kassoway, 2014, p. 2).

Besides trustworthiness, credible sources are also comprised with attributes such as attractiveness (Mutum, Ghazali, Mohd-Any & Nguyen, 2018, p. 80). As follows, brands are

using social media influencers as their voice to appear authentic (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017). Namely, even though a message by an influencer has an advertising purpose, this is less obvious to consumers than when this message would be posted by a brand profile (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017). Strictly speaking, the influencer is not seen as someone who talks about brands, but someone who comments on lifestyle or the topic of interest and is therefore admired. In this case, brands and their products are seen as tools, which can bring the consumer closer to the admired lifestyle or knowledge (Lueck, 2015, p. 103). Therefore, **authenticity** of the influencer is seen as a comprising factor of the credibility driver. Millennials care about the fact that influencer content is authentic and that he or she genuinely likes the brand or product (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010).

One of the most legitimizing credible factors to follow a content is that the influencers possess certain knowledge about a specific topic, which they intend to share in order to educate the consumer about new trends, features etc. (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015, p. 607). Being **informative** is important so that the received information is believed to be correct (Erkan & Evans, 2016, p. 50). This often comes in the form of actionable personal needs–based information (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011, p. 270). If the consumer recognizes this **expertise**, the positive impact that the content is supposed to have on the consumer is expected to intensify (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2014, p. 84).

H2: *Self–identification with influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*

Consumers are driven to follow influencer content if they can **identify** with the lifestyle and interests of the influencer (Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester & Palazon, 2016). One of the main positive attributes of influencers is that they are able to reflect their own image on the brand, which they are promoting in their own content (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017, p. 86; Sassine, 2017). Hence, if the consumer identifies with the influencer and the social group he or she belongs to, it is more likely this person will also identify with the brand (Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013, p. 32). Studies indicate that the more the consumer values self–brand connection, the higher is the commitment to the brand (Yeh & Choi, 2011, p. 149–158; Swaminathan, Page & Gürhan-Canli, 2007).

H3: *Entertainment value of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*

Since younger generational cohorts are turning away from traditional media towards digital media, one primary feature of online content is also satisfying consumers' needs for enjoyment (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013; Smith, 2012). "Young consumers desire immediacy, constant entertainment, discovery, and the ability to create and record" (Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin & Rumpel, 2011, p. 25). Thus,

entertainment is one of the strongest motivations for following influencer content (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011).

H4: *A high number of followers of a profile drives consumers to follow their content.*

Studies show that millennials and Gen Z rely on peer–created or UGC that they relate to for acquiring information (Kassoway, 2014). Peer influence is an important factor also when deciding which profiles to follow (Sassine, 2017). A celebrity endorser with a **high number of followers** is seen to be more physically attractive, trustworthy, and competent, studies show (Jin & Phua, 2014). Those profiles are associated with higher ratings on source credibility compared to a celebrity endorser with a low number of followers. This results in increased consumer intention to follow their content and to build an online friendship with the influencer (Jin & Phua, 2014; Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011).

4.2.2 Preferred content type

Influencer content can be generated in various forms including short or long text, images, video or audio and hyperlinks (Nations, 2017). For marketers it would be beneficial to know what type of content generates most results or is preferred by certain consumer groups.

H5: *Video content is the preferred type of influencer content by young consumers.*

Different SMPs exhibiting a combination of blogging and instant messaging make it much more convenient to communicate with people. According to research, marketers are focusing on mobile **video content** because these generational cohorts are eager to endorse their favourite content through websites like Google Video and YouTube (Smith, 2012), which results in the ability of videos to increase brand awareness, reach wider audiences, and to increase favourability of the brand (eMarketer inc, 2016c).

4.2.3 Attitudes and behaviour towards engagement in BSC

Understanding how consumers engage in eWOM (i.e. liking, sharing, or commenting upon a message) is valuable as marketers identified it as a key performance indicator for advertising success (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017).

H6: *Young consumers actively engage with influencer content.*

SMPs are seen as powerful tools for driving not only targeted traffic, but also conversations and customer engagement (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015, p. 606). According

to Ipsos MediaCT research, Gen Y is spending 30% of their media time engaged with UGC (Kassoway, 2014). Likewise, the Nielsen research states that the average consumer engages with 11.4 pieces of content prior making a purchase (Nielsen, 2015). On the contrary, other studies on engagement in eWOM suggest, that the likelihood of engagement decreases once consumers recognize the influencer's post is sponsored (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017; Abendroth & Heyman, 2011). Thus, the degree of engagement in the eWOM process is dependent on identification with the brand, the influencer community and the trust of fellow community members (Yeh & Choi, 2011, p. 147) – in sum, their attitude.

H7: *Incentives motivate consumers to engage with content.*

It became common practice in influencer marketing to offer **incentives** to consumers in return for following or engagement and the number of followers. While companies are advised to sponsor giveaways on SMPs because rewards are highly correlated with brand awareness (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015, p. 607), millennials are supposed to be less motivated by rewards because in the light of influencer marketing emergence they have become easier to attain (Smith, 2012, p. 89).

H8: *Consumers tolerate sponsored content, but they do not trust it.*

Since BSC is typically motivated by compensation, it displays a more positive attitude toward a product or service than it would otherwise. This is why credibility of such influencer content is often questionable and trust is undermined (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014, p. 259). However, disclosure of BSC does not necessarily lead into content degradation (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017), since BSC has become a daily practice that consumers are familiar with. However, if the receivers feel that the message is biased by compensation, scepticism is growing and may downgrade the credibility of the influencer as well as the message (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014). Consumers are seen to mentally block influencer content if it gets too commercial (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017, p. 33).

H9: *Invasiveness of brand–sponsored posts drives consumers away from following influencer content.*

Such advertising is perceived as being invasive when it distracts or interferes with the consumer's goal–directed behaviour (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011, p. 263). Nevertheless, consumers continue to accept BSC as long as the benefits of their following are greater than the intrusiveness of the advertising content (Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013, p. 668). Still, if the number of endorsements with a specific influencer increases, consumers' attitude towards the content become less favourable (Jin & Phua, 2014).

H10: *Consumers feel all brand–sponsored posts need to be transparent.*

Sponsorship disclosure often results in less favourable message attitudes (Hwang & Jeong, 2016, p. 533). Influencers do not always disclose BSC, so consumers cannot easily detect which content is paid and which is posted organically. On the contrary, according to past research, even if the sponsored nature of the content is disclosed, it is often not noticed by users, since it is too naturally integrated into newsfeeds, therefore it fails to successfully inform about the message's purpose (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017). To protect consumers from deceptive advertising, some states have adopted regulations that urge marketers to disclose all sponsored messages on social media (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

4.2.4 Effect of active engagement in eWOM

Marketers invest in influencer marketing in order to achieve a specific result – to either boost sales or strengthen brand identity (Tomoson, 2015). Therefore, it is compelling to test how generated eWOM is related to the desired outcome.

H11: *Positive eWOM results in higher brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*
H12: *Negative eWOM results in lower brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*

In addition to the latest research (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2018; WhoSay, 2017; Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; eMarketer inc, 2016c; Nielsen, 2015; Tomoson, 2015) speaking in favour of efficiency of BSC, the academic literature has also found that influencer recommendations foster positive eWOM, which in turn improves consumers' purchase intention (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014). Therefore, influencer content affects the attitude of the consumer and further its willingness to purchase a product. A consumer engaging in SMPs typically also receives some knowledge about the brand or product prior to the purchase decision, since eWOM is the strongest form of brand awareness (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015). On the other hand, marketers fear that negative customer reviews of unfavourable experiences can have a substantial economic impact on the brand or company (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 202). Although the SMPs provide various opportunities for strengthening relationship with customers, marketers have little control over message distribution (Weber, 2009, p. 29) and ponder about the actual trade–off.

4.2.5   Differences between generational cohorts

When shaping a message for distribution through online media, it is necessary to define whom this message is targeting and what preferences the target group expresses (Weber, 2009). Since good targeting is key in effective marketing, it is important to be aware of the possible differences between specified target groups.

H13: *Attitudes towards influencer content differ among the generational cohorts.*
H14: *Behaviour towards influencer content differ among the generational cohorts.*

Both generational cohorts are heavily digitalised and savvy smartphone users, however different sources claim there are specific differences in attitudes and behaviour that can result in different marketing approaches (Forbes Coaches Council, 2018; Claveria, 2017; Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; eMarketer inc, 2017). Gen Y is supposed to be far more brand–conscious than Gen Z (Claveria, 2017), and does not share the same beauty ideals, priorities, or content expectations (Forbes Coaches Council, 2018; Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin & Rumpel, 2011). Naturally, because of the difference in their age groups, the generations' social media preferences also differ in addition to the way they consume digital content (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017). Therefore, it is reasonable to reflect on this information and claim that differences between Gen Y and Gen Z exist also in the Slovenian market.

4.3   Model design

Figure 4: The hypotheses model
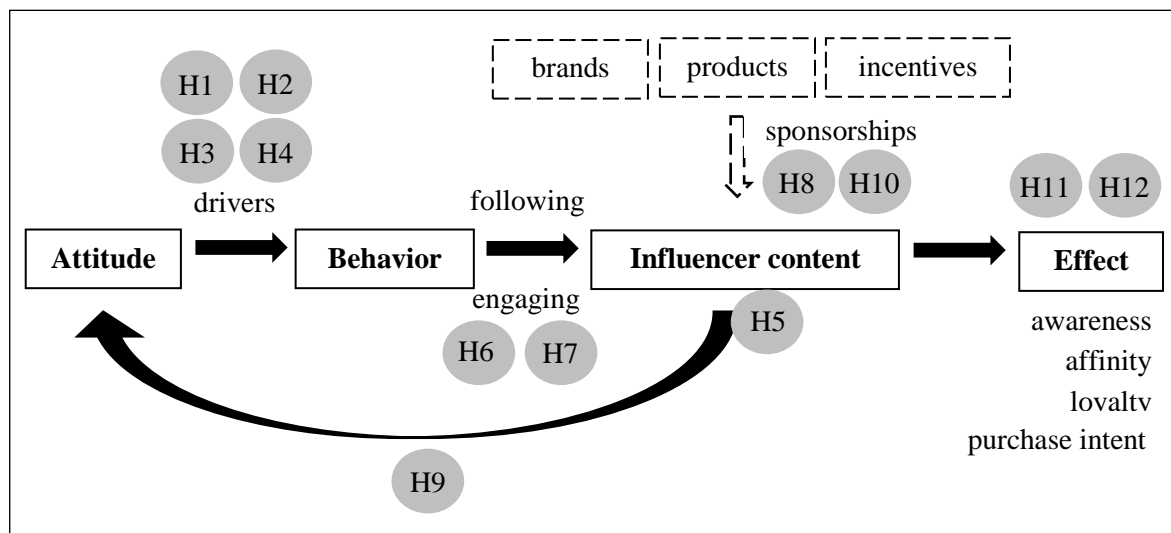
Source: own work.

In order to provide a holistic overview of the set hypotheses, a visual model, presented in Figure 4, was developed. The model illustrates which parts of consumer–influencer relations are tested. The black arrows symbolize the input of the consumer, while the dashed arrow symbolizes the input of companies. These imply that when consumers are driven towards influencer content, they behave either by just following or by also engaging with the content. The following or engagement with influencer content can further result in certain effects. The company inserts its own BSC naturally into influencer content, either promoting its brands, certain products, or providing incentives. When influencer content is sponsored, observed attitudes of consumers can either change or stay the same. The grey round shapes in the model represent the hypotheses respectively.

4.4   Methodology

The methodology of this research is based on primary and secondary data sources. The theoretical framework and concept definitions were based on obtainable academic secondary sources and analysis of statistics and research papers on influencer marketing and social media usage from abroad. Primary data was used for the empirical part of the thesis, and was collected through qualitative and quantitative research. Firstly, **four in–depth interviews** with representatives of both generational cohorts were conducted in order to define patterns of susceptibility for preliminary and exploratory research. The in–depth interviews were not used to obtain final findings, but were important for gaining a deeper understanding of reasoning by consumers, highlighting additional insights of their perceptions, and assisted in the construction of a relevant questionnaire. Based on the respondents' answers, some measurement scales were modified with additional items. Moreover, the in–depth interview discussions were related to the results of quantitative research. Thus, the advantages of combining both research methods became evident. The outcomes of qualitative research are presented in section 5.1, whereas the categorized transcripts are given in Appendix E.

Secondly, the **survey questionnaire** presents the central part of this research in order to determine behavioural habits and attitudes towards influencer content on digital media of young Slovenian consumers. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen topic–related questions, focusing on key identified drivers of following, determination of preferred influencer content type, engagement practices, attitudes toward BSC, and effects of active eWOM. Additionally, seven demographic questions and one optional open–ended question at the end were added. In order for this research to be valid and reliable, the questionnaire was based on existing measurement scales established in the literature. Moreover, a new measurement scale measuring BSC attitudes was developed. In this way, context–related

relevance was ensured. Before the survey was published it was pre–tested by a small group of potential respondents, in order to polish confusing wording and to check on the understanding of its content.

4.4.1   Measures

The defined hypotheses were measured through several pre–existing and some newly developed measuring scales and items as shown in Table 2. The pre–existing measures that were employed in this study were borrowed from various literature sources and adapted to the context of influencer marketing. Since additional findings arose out of the conducted in–depth interviews, some new measures were derived from the qualitative outcomes and supplementary items were added to the adapted measuring scales. The digital space is developing daily and so are the opportunities to reach consumers, marketing techniques and features that are enabled by various SMPs (Weber, 2009). Therefore, measuring scales cannot be simply adopted, but need to be updated and adjusted to the current context and topic of relevance.

At the beginning of the survey the participants were asked whether they are registered on any SMP. The introductory question separated social media users from social media non–users. In order to ensure additional information on the difference in attitudes and to check the indifference among groups of respondents, control variables of social media use patterns were measured. Therefore, social media users were asked to indicate which SMPs they visit while also measuring their frequency of use, adopted from Boerman, Willemsen and Van Der Aa (2017), and followed by a question about the purpose of their use, which was developed from two scales by Chu and Kim (2011) and Halliday (2016). An item on influencer content was added to the list of possible purposes.

Since it was evident that the interviewees tend to change their attitudes and behaviours depending on whether they are following Slovene or foreign influencers, an additional question was added to measure the origin of influencers, which are followed by the respondents (*1 = "only Slovenian", 2 = "only foreign", 3 = "Slovenian and foreign", 4 = "I do not follow influencers"*). Next, respondents were asked to mark on which channels they spend time following influencer content and which topics of interests do they cover. These items were also derived from the in–depth interview findings. Chatterjee (2011) and Smith (2012) found that users prefer brand recommendations via video content, therefore a measuring scale was adopted from their findings, in which users were asked to rank content types according to their preferences (*1 = "video", 2 = "photo", 3 = "photo and text", 4 = "short text", 5 = "long text"*).

Table 2: Overview of measures adopted from pre–existing scales

Measured variable	Dimensionality	Source of scale	Year	New items added
Credibility	Multidimensional (7 items)	Erkan & Evans Mutum, Ghazali, Mohd-Any & Nguyen Taylor, Lewin & Strutton Yeh & Choi	2016 2018 2011 2011	1 item: Authenticity (passion)
Self–identification	Two–dimensional (2 items)	Lee & Watkins	2016	/
Entertainment	Unidimensional	Taylor, Lewin & Strutton	2011	/
High nr. of followers	Multidimensional (4 items)	Jin & Phua	2014	/
Active engagement (eWOM)	Multidimensional (6 items)	Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa	2017	3 items: Behaviour (save, follow/subscribe, negative comment)
Incentives	Multidimensional (4 items)	Mutum, Ghazali, Mohd-Any & Nguyen	2018	3 items: Incentives (motivational behaviour)
High effect* (positive)	Multidimensional (5 items)	Bush, Martin & Bush Duffet Lu, Chang & Chang	2004 2015 2014	1 item: Brand awareness 1 item: Brand affinity 1 item: Brand loyalty
Low effect** (negative)	Multidimensional (3 items)			

Source: own work.
*Note: High effect as a positive spectrum including – higher brand awareness, higher brand affinity, higher brand loyalty and higher intent to purchase.
**Note: Low effect as a negative spectrum including – low brand affinity, low brand loyalty, low intent to purchase.

The queries on drivers, engagement and effect of eWOM were formed in short statements and assessed on a 5–point Likert scale measuring either the level of agreement (ranging from

1 = "strongly disagree" to *5 = "strongly agree"*) or frequency (from *1 = "never"* to *5 = "always"*). Statements like "I write comments on posts", "I skip sponsored content and focus on other content that I like" and "When I see a brand or product mentioned in a post of the influencer, I remember it" measured engagement, invasiveness of BSC and eWOM effect on brand awareness respectively on the frequency level. "I follow influencers, if I can identify with them" and "A high number of followers tells me that the content is good" are examples of questions on the drivers that motivate consumers to follow certain content measured on the agreement level. Moreover, respondents were asked to suggest what they consider to be a high number of followers by filling in a blank space.

Table 3: Overview of newly–constructed measures

Measured variable	Dimensionality	Based on	Format
Preferred content type	Unidimensional	Chatterjee (2011), Smith (2012), In–depth interviews	Drag and drop ranking system (1–5)
Tolerance of SC	Unidimensional	Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa (2017), In–depth interviews	5–point Likert scale (agreement levels)
Trust of SC	Unidimensional	Lu, Chang & Chang (2014), In–depth interviews	5–point Likert scale (agreement levels)
Invasiveness of SC	Two–dimensionality (2 items)	Celebirty Intelligence (2017), Mutum, Ghazali, Mohd-Any & Nguyen (2018), In–depth interviews	5–point Likert scale (agreement levels)
Transparency of SC	Unidimensional	Hwang & Jeong, (2016), In–depth interviews	5–point Likert scale (agreement levels)

Source: own work.

Table 2 summarizes the measuring scales employed to the used questionnaire from existing literature, while Table 3 presents an overview of new developed measurement scales. Reliability of the measurement scales was measured by calculating Cronbach's Alpha and running a Factor analysis. By analysing the factor loadings in the component matrix of the 'Credibility' variable, it was observed that there is sufficient internal consistency, however, the factor loadings of some items also indicated that the 'Credibility' variable in fact consists of two subgroups. That is to say, not all influencers are perceived experts and authentic at

the same time. Therefore, two different types of influencers might be considered credible: specialists, who have certain knowledge about a field of interest and are able to be informative and educational (examples: yoga teachers, automotive enthusiasts), and attractive personalities, who are trusted and seen as credible because of their charisma, passionate storytelling, and similar. The first are comprised by the expertise and informative items, the second are thought of when applying authentic items respectively. Nevertheless, an influencer can as well be both – an expert, who appears to be very authentic. Additional specifics and an overview of reliability tests regarding the adopted variables that were used to measure the hypotheses in this study are listed in Appendix D.

The survey also included questions on demographics, such as gender, year of birth, education, employment and relationship status, income, and region of accommodation. At the end a non–compulsory question was added, which asked the respondent to identify his or her favourite influencer. The entire survey template in Slovenian can be found in Appendix C.

4.4.2   Data collection

The questionnaire was conducted via an online survey built on the 1ka platform. Responses were gathered by convenience sampling, while the link to the survey was publicly distributed on various social media channels like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, therefore making sure only social media users were targeted with the message. The link to the survey was sent to some addressees directly by email or private messaging platforms, although the majority of the respondents found the link to the survey on their personal newsfeeds.

In order to properly address the target group and because video content is the preferred type of content by young consumers, a 2:44 minutes long video was produced. The video with the title "This is not my vlog: What is your attitude towards influencer content?" (Kern, 2018) referenced various observed influencer content techniques in the manner of a parody, while adding the request to complete the online survey. The message distribution seemed to be effective, since on Facebook alone the video received 7.1 thousand video views, 228 likes, 74 comments and 38 shares. Additionally, shorter versions of the video received 170 views on Instagram stories and 51 likes on newsfeed. On Twitter 8,358 impressions were gained, 1,591 media views, 677 engagements and 25 retweets gathered. The survey link was active for five days between 13th July 2018 and 18th July 2018 and received 1,153 clicks, however not all responses were valid.

788 valid responses were received, which include partially and fully completed questionnaire entries. The sample was downsized to 642 respondents after eliminating incomplete questionnaire responses. The sample of 642 respondents consisted of registered social media users, who were further divided into a group of people who deny following influencer content and into a group of people who confirmed they follow influencer content. 232 social media users stated that they do not follow any influencers. They were labelled as "non–followers". For this reason, they were excluded from further analysis of attitudes and behaviour towards influencer content. The rest of the sample, consisting of 410 survey respondents labelled as "followers", were guided through an additional 11 questions that defined their attitude, perception, and behaviour towards influencer content. Although this thesis focuses on young consumers, older outliers were included in the descriptive overview of survey respondents because it is deemed valuable for practitioners and theorists to know whether any differences of demographic statistics or social media preferences exist between subgroups. In the final sample under analysis only followers from Gen Y and Gen Z were included (N=375), while all non–followers and older respondents were excluded from the analysis. An overview of the sample structure is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Overview of the basic sample structure

	Non–followers		Followers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gen Z	25	11%	**103**	**25%**	128	20%
Gen Y	134	58%	**272**	**66%**	406	63%
Gen X or older	73	31%	35	9%	108	17%
All	232	100%	410	100%	642	100%
Excluded	232	100%	35	9%	267	42%
Sample under analysis	0	0%	375	91%	**375**	**58%**

Source: own work.

Throughout the questionnaire, key concepts were explained and examples provided in order to unify the respondents' understanding of who is considered to be an influencer and what formats certain types of content stand for. In this way, possible misconceptions were avoided. Respondents were informed of the survey length before entering the questions. Moreover, they were able to observe their completion of the survey with the help of a simple bar indicating the completed percentage of the survey in the top left corner of the page.

5 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter focuses on the presentation of results from qualitative and quantitative research. First, the outcomes from in–depth interviews are displayed. Secondly, the outcomes of quantitative research are given, focusing first on demographic profiling of the respondents, turning to descriptive statistics of social media usage and concluding this chapter with the results of hypotheses testing.

5.1 Qualitative research findings

Before the questionnaire was published and launched, four exploratory in–depth interviews were conducted in order to discuss the theoretical findings and the set hypotheses model with representatives of generation Y (person R and M) and generation Z (person J and K). Two representatives of each were chosen according to purposive and convenience sampling. It was crucial to select representatives who follow some influencers of their own, so they would provide valuable insights from practice, but have different following habits and interests, so the discussion would be diverse during each interview. One male (person R) and three females (person M, J, K) were interviewed, of whom each used at least two SMPs daily, but had different preferences. All information about the respondents and transcriptions of their interviews organized by categories (perceived purpose of social media, attitudes towards influencer content, discussion on drivers, insights on BSC, engagement behaviour and the perceived effects) can be found in Appendix E.

5.1.1 On social media use and influencers

All interviewees see SMPs as platforms for killing time, when they are bored, in need for fresh ideas or inspiration, and in order to be in step with trends from abroad. Moreover, SMPs are mainly used also for connecting with friends and acquaintances and to share daily details on everyday life, news and chatting. When the topic of influencer marketing was brought up, one of the first statements from Gen Y representatives was that this is a self–promotional practice connected to sales, as was stated by R:

"I think this is a marketing construct for people, who have many followers. But for ordinary people – not celebrities."

However, the purpose of content–generation seems to be important. Influencers who exploit their profiles for brand–sponsored advertising, are seen as less favourable than influencers who built their personality on personal belief and passion, which was mentioned by M:

"... some are doing it for a living, therefore they need to promote products in order to get paid. However the purpose of others is to have an influence on society – for example they care for the environment or promote mental health – I like the latter far more."

Gen Z representatives seem to care less about the purpose behind content–generation, since this discussion did not come up until they were directly asked about BSC. An influencer is perceived broadly, comprising of celebrities as well as peers. K stated that the latter are seen as more reliable, because it is easier to see them as role models. Additionally, influencers are seen as successful individuals who are extroverted and are able to motivate their following crowd. Both interviewees of Gen Z expressed some kind of admiration:

"If you want to be an influencer, you need to be the kind of person who is prepared to share opinions with different people – maybe in this way you can even change the world."

"I follow some out of pity. But then they are able to achieve so much! And this motivates me – if they can do it, I am able to do it as well."

In terms of preferred content type, three of the respondents argued for video, because they see it as the easiest and most convenient way to attain information or to get entertained. All of them follow YouTube channels and IG stories regularly. On the other hand, M argued for photos, because she is able to consume this type of content also at work, when she experiences a downfall of motivation. As argued, photos can be consumed in a number of seconds without turning the sound on.

5.1.2   On drivers towards influencer content

In–depth interviews suggest that it is extremely important how the content is delivered to followers. On one hand, M and R perceive good influencers to be more like profound journalists or charismatic broadcasters. Expertise is valued more on some topics than others, as argued by M:

"I notice it, when I search for recommendation in sport nutrition and fitness – I only trust someone who has finished Faculty of Sports or someone who I know is educated in that topic. Namely, someone who has established a name. If it impacts my health, I double–check who makes the recommendation."

On the other hand, honesty and passion are two factors that show how authentic the content really is. All respondents believe they are able to recognize when someone really stands behind a cause he or she promotes. Respondents agree that the followed content always

expresses their interests and their current occupation of mind. However, sometimes they follow content just out of the enjoyment of being amused, as indicated by J:

"Mostly I follow people, who drive around in cars, wondering what they want to buy next, they have fun and do pranks. I don't have anything out of it, but spend some time watching it nevertheless."

No common ground was found when discussing the number of followers. R believes that the number of followers is an indicator of attractiveness and regular popular content, J thinks someone with a high number of followers is worth to be followed, whereas K is indifferent to those numbers. M expressed scepticism toward the displayed number of followers:

"I often question the number of followers somebody has, because there has been many affairs with fake followers recently. I compare the number of followers with the content, which was created or the number of video views."

5.1.3   On BSC

M and R expressed strong feelings towards the practice of offering incentives in the form of bonuses and give–aways. M explained that such content annoys her, because it became too common, while R stops following content if influencers start engaging in such practices. Gen Zs, J and K, have a more laid–back attitude; most of the time they simply ignore it, except if something is offered that appears to be of good quality or interesting to try out. In general, the interviewees said they do not trust BSC, but they tolerate it as long as it falls within the area of interest and lifestyle of the influencer. M and K respectively are hesitant to get too attached to sponsored recommendations:

"As soon as I see a product featured in a post, I start doubting it is real."

"I am hesitant towards sponsored posts, because I have the feeling that the influencer had to praise the product that is being promoted."

It is important that the BSC does not appear too intrusive, as expressed by J:

"It happened that I unfollowed a person just because of that. Basically, I would just like to watch something till the end without some ad content intruding the process. ... Even five seconds of waiting for the ad to pass is too much for me."

Since influencer marketing rapidly spread through UGC sites and is sometimes difficult to detect, M is firm in her believe that:

"All sponsored content would need to be clearly marked, especially because of the younger population."

5.1.4 On engagement behaviour

Interviewees shared the practice of regularly browsing through newsfeeds and checking on content that is suggested for them by a specific SMP. Active engagement does not appear to be very common, although M states she presses like on everything she actually likes. Comments are rare, except for K, who sometimes tags her friends under posts. Sharing content is seen as an even higher form of engagement. No public sharing of content was detected, but all of them share content with friends privately, if they judge it is something exceptional. Although interest towards a specific content is not expressed in active engagement, passive engagement can be as powerful as commenting or sharing; for example J mentioned:

"Me and my friends watch the same channels, so we can talk about them afterwards."

Influencer content has developed to be a topic of conversation not only online but offline as well. Good content spreads not only via digital channels but also in the form of usual word–of–mouth. However, interviewees do not do much about bad content. Mostly, they tend to ignore it and browse further, while the strongest form of negative attitude sometimes transforms into simply unfollowing the disliked influencer.

5.1.5 On the effects of BSC of influencers

Respondents were successful at linking certain brand names to some influencers. Moreover, they admitted that influencers' opinions affect their brand perceptions and sometimes their purchase intentions as well. They were introduced to new products that they have not known before and started to express interest towards a brand after an influencer convinced them of its quality. K and M admit:

"It happens often that I am introduced to a product via influencer's content. If I feel like I would like to try it as well, I am deliberately going to shop for this product.

"I think that influencers' opinions have affected my purchasing decisions in the past. In majority it was about food."

On the other hand, R could not reflect on such a situation, but did not deny it would be possible to happen sometime in the future. J denied her purchase habits were influenced by any of the influencers whom she follows:

"No, opinions of these people do not affect what I buy. Only people that I personally know, have this kind of influence."

By this, she confirms the theory that the tighter the personal connection with someone is, the higher is the probability their advice would be taken into account. However, obviously there are ways in which influencers can get very close to the perception of personal friendship connection with their followers.

5.2   Quantitative research findings

In order to analyse the obtained quantitative data, the IBM SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences) Statistics version 22.0 software was used. After the data set was cleaned from incomplete respondents' entries, variables were sorted into common categories and the open–ended questions were reviewed for possible patterns, which could construct additional variables. No such patterns were identified. Following the accepted practice, new variables were computed by averaging the item values of the pre–set measuring scales, wherever possible. Firstly, the demographic statistics were identified for the sample. Secondly, descriptive software methods were used to determine frequency and purpose of social media usage, then focusing on insights of influencer content. Thirdly, the analysis focused on hypotheses testing methods. The following methods were used throughout this research:

- **Descriptive statistics** (Frequencies, Descriptives, Crosstabs) were used to observe the means, modes, standard deviations and patterns of answers for initial insights and better understanding of the outcomes
- **One–Sample T–Test** was used to compare differences in the mean scores of continuous–level between the sample and hypothesized population mean
- **Independent Sample T–Test** was used to compare the variables' means of generation Y and Z, so it could be determined whether the means of both cohorts are significantly different

- **Linear regression** was used to estimate whether positive or negative eWOM generated by users is a good predictor and how does it impact the effect, which influencer content has on brand awareness, affinity, loyalty and purchase intent of a brand or product
- **Cronbach's alpha** was accounted for to test the reliability and measure the internal consistency of measurement scales on the basis of the obtained data
- **Factor analysis** was run to observe factor loadings and correlations of coefficients selected for the measurement scales, in order to improve the scales

5.2.1   Demographic profile of respondents

According to the affirmative and negative statements of the respondents regarding whether they follow influencer content or not, 642 respondents were divided into two groups. The first group consists of 232 social media users, who were labelled as "non–followers". The second group, which was labelled as "followers", consists of 410 survey respondents. Here, only "followers" were analysed for demographic profiling. However, Appendix F provides an additional overview of differences between characteristics of followers and non–followers.

In the "followers" sample (N=410) female respondents represent 77.3% of participants, whereas male respondents represent 22.7%. The age of the "followers" ranges from 16 to 70 years, while the average age is 27.64 years. The majority of the "followers" are 27 years old. Therefore the majority (66.3%) of respondents belongs to the Gen Y, while there are 25.1% representatives of Gen Z. 33.4% of the "followers" have finished only primary schooling or high school. Roughly, a third of them (32.9%) acquired a bachelor degree at the university, 21.2% has a master degree and 0.2% holds a PhD. The rest (12.2%) finished some other type of tertiary education at a non–university level. 52% of the "followers" are employed, while 41.7% are students. A small minority is unemployed (4.9%) or retired (1%). More than half of the "followers" (58.3%) receive a monthly income below 1,000 €. The vast majority of the respondents is in a relationship (38.5%) or single (35.1%), whereas 24.9% of the respondents are married, or live in an extramarital union. A small share (1%) of the "followers" is divorced or enjoys another relationship status. Moreover, the majority of respondents (54.1%) from the conducted data are currently living in Gorenjska region and 29% are from Osrednjeslovenska region. Nevertheless, all other regions are represented as well, ranging from 1% to 4.4% of the sample, while there were only three respondents from Zasavska region. Although the central and western regions stand out, the data covers diverse social and economic indicators of the population and is rich in Gen Y and Gen Z representatives; therefore, it is suitable for further analysis.

When comparing "followers" and "non–followers", the sample of "followers" is younger, comprised of more females and students, whereas the "non–followers" sample has a higher employment rate, education level and a slightly higher income. As indicated with this descriptive analysis, it may be confirmed that young consumers are the appropriate target audience of influencer marketing, since 91% of the "followers" consist of Gen Z and Gen Y, while there are only 9% of respondents who belong in older generational cohorts.

5.2.2   Descriptive analysis of social media use

Turning towards the descriptive analysis in regards to social media, frequency and the purpose of usage had been tested. In general, it may be observed that the frequency of social media use is lower with "non–followers" than with "followers", which suggests the first are to a lesser extent exposed to the influencer content. Additionally, "followers" are more likely to use social media networks for following celebrities, brands, and influencers (shown in Appendix F). These patterns are consistent with the choices both subgroups made, when asked, whether they follow influencer content or not. Therefore, it can be concluded that the "followers" sample proves to be representative for further analysis.

Initially, there were 406 representatives of generation Y and 128 representatives of generation Z in the bigger sample. However, 33% of Gen Y representatives noted they do not follow influencer content. There were only 19.5% of Gen Z who share this behaviour. Since "non–followers" were excluded, the final sample under examination comprises of **272 representatives of generation Y** (66.3% of the "followers") and **103 representatives of generation Z** (25.1% of the "followers"). The rest of the "followers" sample consists of older representatives that belong to other generational cohorts and those respondents were excluded from further analysis. Therefore, for this analysis only the sample of "younger Slovenian consumers" (N=375) was used.

Gen Y consists 20.5% of men and 79.5% of women, while there are 22.3% men and 77.7% women in Gen Z. A comparison of the frequency of social media use reveals that on average, the most frequently used social media with both generations is Facebook. Observations also indicate that Snapchat is far more popular with Gen Z than Gen Y and that Gen Z either engages with their preferred SMPs on a regular basis (once per day: Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat) or very little (less than once per month: Pinterest, Twitter). Gen Y uses YouTube and Instagram on a daily basis as well, but frequency means of both SMPs for this generation are smaller compared to Gen Z, which indicates that Gen Z is a more frequent user of Instagram and YouTube than Gen Y is. Moreover, after these observations an additional Independent Samples T–Test was run, in order to prove if the differences provided with the

descriptive statistics, which are true for the sample, are also statistically significant for the entire population. The results show that the findings provided in Table 5 hold for all SMPs but for Instagram.

Table 5: Favourite SMPs of Gen Y and Gen Z by frequency of use

| Gen Y N=272	vs	Gen Z N=103
SMP	**Frequency of use**	**SMP**
Facebook	2–5 times per day	Facebook
YouTube	once per day	Instagram*
		YouTube
Instagram*		Snapchat
Snapchat	once to twice per month	/
Pinterest		
Twitter		
/	less than once per month	Pinterest
		Twitter

Source: own work.
Note: N(Gen Y)=272, N(Gen Z)=103.
*Was proven statistically insignificant.

In terms of the purpose of social media use, the behaviours of both generational cohorts seem to be very similar (see Figure 5). Passing time or using SMPs out of boredom and looking for new ideas, inspiration and trends are one of the strongest aims to use SMPs, according to both cohorts. One distinguishable difference that stands out from others is the use of social media for following celebrities. 39.8% of Gen Z are admitting to this purpose, while only 23.9% of Gen Y shares this behaviour. Moreover, 2.6% of Gen Y added that they use social media for work–related promotion activities to the provided list of purposes. However, because no representative of Gen Z expressed the same purpose of use, the factor was excluded from the comparison. As only 31.9% Gen Ys and 33% Gen Zs had chosen that following influencers is one of the aims for using SMPs, it can be concluded that influencer content for the majority of the survey respondents is something they follow while performing other activities, and is not a decisive reason to use a specific SMP.

The vast majority of both generational cohorts (generation Y – 62.1%, generation Z – 72.8%), who do follow influencers, follow Slovenian and foreign influencers, while 16.9% of Gen Y and 19.4% of Gen Z stated that they follow only foreign influencers. As

respondents were asked to name their favourite influencer at the very end of the survey, 15 respondents named 'Komotar Minuta', 11 of them named 'CoolFotr' and 5 of them 'Barbi in Matic'. Instagram is the favourite channel for following influencer content for both generations; 75.7% of Gen Z follow influencers on Instagram, while the ratio is slightly lower with Gen Y, namely at 68%. A very strong influencer channel among Gen Z is also YouTube, since 64.1% stated they follow such content on this SMP, however it is popular also among Gen Y, where 46.3% of the generation followers use it for keeping up to date with such content. Facebook competes with the aforementioned SMPs with 46.7% Gen Ys and 40.8% Gen Zs using this platform for following influencer content. The rest of the platforms on the list (Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest and the additional LinkedIn and Tumlbr) are not seen as being connected with influencer content since only 12.6% or less of the generational cohorts use it for following influencers.

Figure 5: Overview of the purpose of using SMPs, comparing Gen Y and Gen Z (%)
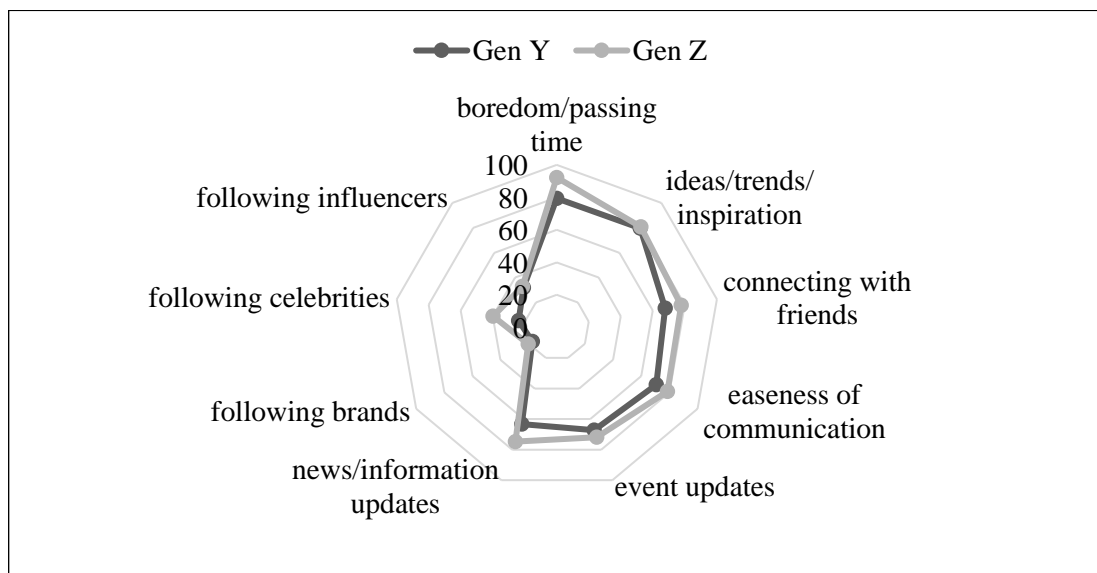
Source: own work.
Note: N(Gen Y)=272, N(Gen Z)=103.

In terms of influencer topics of interests, some differences were observed between Gen Y and Gen Z. While both cohorts prefer to follow influencer content on fashion, travel, sports and lifestyle, Gen Y is also largely interested in content on cooking and recipes, while Gen Z's favourite content talks about photography, music, films and literature (as shown in Figure 6). On the basis of conducted data, those two topics define the differences between both generational cohorts.

Figure 6: Overview of influencer topics of interest compared between Gen Y and Gen Z
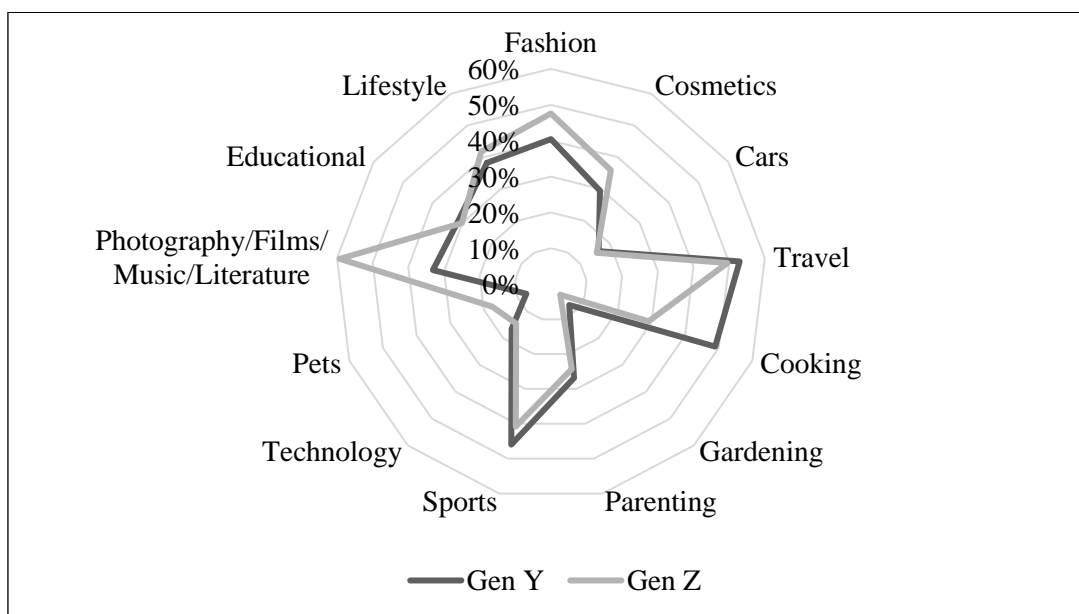
Source: own work.
Note: N(Gen Y)=272, N(Gen Z)=103.

5.2.3   Hypotheses testing

The presented hypotheses results are following the sequential order of the hypotheses model suggested in chapter 4.

(1) The drivers affecting following behavior:

H1: *Credibility of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*
H2: *Self–identification with influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*
H3: *Entertainment value of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*
H4: *A high number of followers of a profile drives consumers to follow their content.*

In order to define key drivers of influencer following, four hypotheses were developed, representing four different drivers, which are supposed to serve as antecedents of following decisions of young Slovenian consumers, whether to follow an influencer profile or not. All four hypotheses were tested with the One–Sample T–test method, where the value 3 (3= "neither agree or disagree") was chosen as the test value.

Table 6: One–Sample T–test results for H1–H4

Test value = 3	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2–tailed)	Mean Difference
Credibility	3.8933	38.474			0.8477
Self–identification	3.7787	19.859	374	0.000	0.7016
Entertainment	4.17	31.211			1.09
Nr. of followers	2.5449	-10.295			-0.5420

Source: own work.
Note: N=375.

As shown in Table 6, all drivers shape attitudes of young Slovenian consumers at a high statistical significance (p=0.000, two–tailed). Credibility (M=3.89, SD=0.45), self–identification (M=3.78, SD=0.76), and entertainment (M=4.17, SD=0.725) of an influencer are proven to be important drivers for consumers towards following his or her content, whereas a high number of followers (M=2.54, SD=0.86) that an influencer has is not a factor, which would contribute to this decision. Therefore, we can conclude that *young Slovenian consumers follow influencer content if they believe that the influencer is credible, entertaining, and if they are able to identify with his or her interests and personality.* Comparing means between those drivers, entertainment is the most decisive antecedent of following, followed by credibility (based either on expertise or authenticity) and self–identification. However, a high number of followers does not drive consumers to follow influencer content. Results of the analysis are also presented in Appendix G.

Table 7: Statistics on the perceived level of high number of followers

Mean	22,755
Median	10,000
Mode	10,000
Std. Deviation	33,367.257
Minimum	1,000
Maximum	200,000

Source: own work.
Note: N=342, results for Slovenian market.

Moreover, it is interesting to determine what consumers perceive to be a high number of followers. The survey entries were observed after the highest 5% (anything above 226.600 followers) and lowest 5% (anything below 1.000 followers) of entries were deleted from

data. The frequency statistics can be observed in Table 7. On average, an influencer with a high number of followers would be someone who has at least **22,755 followers**.

(2) Preferred content type

H5: *Video content is the preferred type of influencer content by young consumers.*

According to the results presented in Figure 7, this hypothesis can be confirmed, since most respondents perceive video as their preferred content type generated by influencers. Namely, 45.3% of consumers ranked video as their top preference and 16.8% of consumers said it was their second choice. No other content type was ranked first choice as frequently as video (photo – 26.4%, photo with text – 13.6%, short text – 7.7%, long text – 6.9%).

Figure 7: Statistics on the preferred content type by young consumers (%)
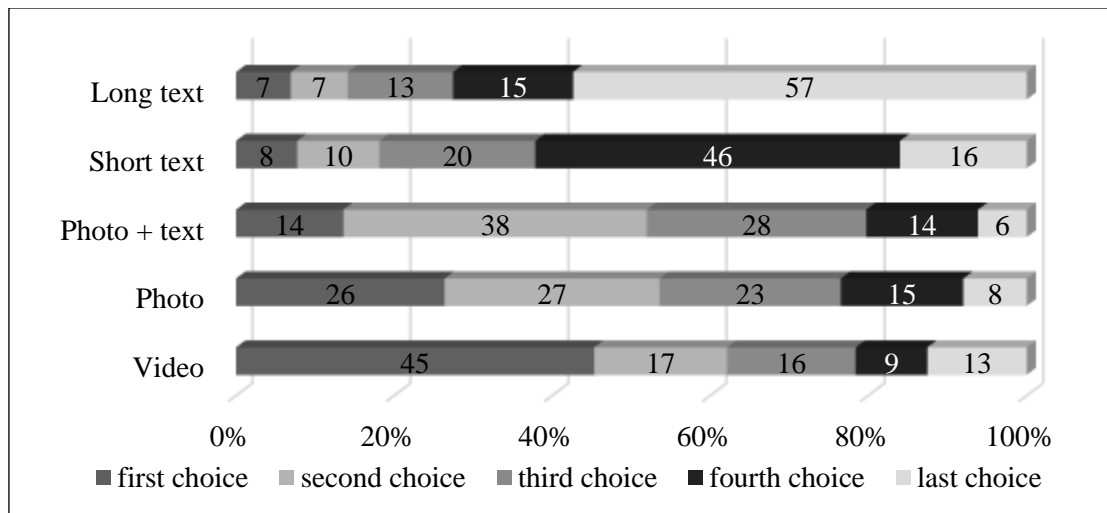
Source: own work.
Note: N=375.

Moreover, this hypothesis can be confirmed also by comparing means and modes of each content type, since video was most frequently chosen as the preferred content type. Video (M=2.27, Mo=1) has the lowest mean and is the only content with the mode of 1 when compared to photo (M=2.51, Mo=2), photo with text (M=2.61, Mo=2), short text (M=3.52, Mo=4) and long text (M=4.09, Mo=5). For detailed results, please see Appendix H.

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(3) Attitudes and behaviour towards engagement in BSC of influencers

H6: *Young consumers actively engage with influencer content.*
H7: *Incentives motivate consumers to engage with content.*

Both hypotheses were tested with the One–Sample T–Test, where the test value was set at the middle value of the measurement scale (3= "sometimes") as shown in Table 8. If consumers are actively engaging with influencer content, then the arithmetic mean of the sample would need to be higher than 3.00, meaning that on average consumers would choose they "often" or "always" engage with content, which they like or do not like. The same assumption was made for examination of the 'Incentive' variable. If the mean would be higher than 3.00, this would indicate incentives "often" or "always" motivate consumers to engage with content.

Table 8: One–Sample T–test results for H6 and H7

Test value = 3	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2–tailed)	Mean Difference
Active engagement	1.9968	-38.351	369	0.000	-1.00315
Incentives	2.0147	-22.922	355	0.000	-0.98525

Source: own work.
Note: N(active engagement)=370, N(incentives)=356.

Since the means of both variables are far below the tested value, both hypotheses are rejected at a high significance value (p=0.000, two–tailed). Moreover, even when taking the mean difference of both variables in account, the same conclusion would be made. The results of H6 were tested with a control One–Sample T–Test of the items that were measuring passive behaviour. The control test suggests that consumers tend to passively observe content rather than engage with it, since the mean of the control test resulted above 3.00 at a high statistical significance (p=0.015 and p=0.000, two–tailed) as well.

Additionally, frequencies were observed to justify these results. These have shown that the means of items measuring active behaviour were below 3.00 for all items, except for the act of liking (M=3.00). This indicates that consumers sometimes press like on the content. The items with statements of passive behaviour received the highest values. Of all possible engagement actions, consumers are least likely to comment, whether they are positively or negatively provoked, since the mean values of both items measuring comment behaviour

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were the lowest with very small standard deviations. They are also not likely to share content with friends or blocking users; these mean values also lie below 2.00.

Likewise, H7 was tested with another control test based on the variable that suggested the opposite; namely, that people simply ignore incentives and focus on other content. The test confirmed our results with at a high significance level (p=0.000, two–tailed) and the mean value at 3.48. Therefore, it can be concluded that on average incentives do not motivate young consumers to engage with influencer content. In other words, consumers tend to ignore those incentives and focus on the content they were looking for.

H8: *Consumers tolerate sponsored content, but they do not trust it.*
H9: *Invasiveness of brand–sponsored posts drives consumers away from following influencer content.*
H10: *Consumers feel all brand–sponsored posts need to be transparent.*

Again the three hypotheses, which aimed to test users' attitudes and behaviour towards BSC, were examined with the tool One–Sample T–Test, where the test value was set at 3.00 (3 = "neither agree nor disagree"), which represented the middle value of the measurement scale. In order to assess H8, two T–tests were run, each of them measuring either trust or tolerance of consumers towards BSC. If the mean value of the examined variables would be higher than 3.00, this would indicate that consumers tend to trust and tolerate BSC generated by influencers, whereas if the mean values would result in 3.00 or lower the opposite is true. At a high statistical significance (p=0.000, two–tailed) the tests showed that on average consumers tolerate BSC on influencer profiles (M=3.43), while at the same time they tend not to trust them (M=2.72). Therefore, the H8 is confirmed.

As shown in Table 9, where an overview of the test results are presented, H9 can be confirmed as well. At a high statistical significance (p=0.000, two–tailed) it is true that the mean value of the 'Invasiveness' variable (M=3.199) is higher than the test value. This illustrates that consumers drive away from influencer content if they perceive BSC is too invasive. However, a detailed overview of the respondents' answers shows that they hold moderate feelings towards invasiveness of BSC. The first indicator of this interpreted outcome is the mean value, which balances the mean slightly toward the affirming pole. The second indicators are the median (3.00) and the mode (3.00), which show that majority of the consumers neither agree nor disagree with the statement that invasiveness of BSC is the reason, which drives them away from certain influencer profiles.

Table 9: One–Sample T–test results for H8–H10

Test value = 3	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2–tailed)	Mean Difference
BSC tolerate	3.43	11.863	373	0.000	0.430
BSC trust	2.72	-6.442	374	0.000	-0.283
Invasiveness	3.1987	4.084	374	0.000	0.19867
BSC transparent	4.11	23.480	374	0.000	1.115

Source: own work.
Note: N(BSC tolerate)=374, N(BSC trust, Invasiveness, BSC transparent)=375.

The opposite is true when it comes to the transparency issue of BSC. The mean of this variable is the highest among the ones presented (M=4.11) in Table 9, indicating respondents feel strongest about this parameter. With a high statistical significance (p=0.000, two–tailed) it can be concluded that consumers believe that all BSC should be clearly marked when generating such posts. Namely, 81.1% consumers clearly agree or strongly agree with this statement.

(4) Effect of active engagement in eWOM

H11: *Positive eWOM results in higher brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*
H12: *Negative eWOM results in lower brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*

Hypotheses H11 and H12 were tested using linear regression analysis, since causality was examined. Table 10 shows that positive eWOM is a statistically significant (p=0.000) predictor of high effect, which stands for a positive outcome on brand awareness, brand affinity, brand loyalty, and purchase intent. On the basis of the F statistics, the hypothesis stating that positive eWOM results in higher brand awareness, affinity, loyalty, and purchase intent, can be confirmed at a very low level of risk. This means if a consumer increases his positive eWOM rate (in the form of liking, commenting or sharing a post of the influencer) by 10%, his or her purchase intent will increase by 5.48%. Moreover, if these results are generalised to the whole population, it can be claimed with a 95% confidence, that in this case the increase of purchase intent of a random user would range between 4.36% and 6.59%.

Table 10: Linear regression results of H11

Hypothesis 11	Total R^2	Adjusted R^2	F statistics	Sig.
Model H11	0.211	0.209	92.978	0.000
	B	**Sig.**		
(Constant)	1.458	0.000		
EWOMpositive	0.548	0.000		

Source: own work.
Note: dependent variable – EFFECThigh, predictors: (Constant), EWOMpositive, N=350.

Furthermore, Table 11 shows that negative eWOM is also a statistical significant predictor of low effect, which stands for a negative outcome on brand affinity, brand loyalty, and purchase intent. Based on the F statistics, the hypothesis stating that negative eWOM results in lower brand affinity, loyalty, and purchase intent, can be confirmed at a relatively low level of risk. In a hypothetical situation, this translates in the following outcome: if a consumer increases his negative eWOM rate (in the form of commenting on a post of the influencer) by 10% his or her purchase intent will decrease by 1.49%. Moreover, if these results are generalised to the whole population, it can be claimed with a 95% confidence that in this situation the decrease of purchase intent of a random user would range between 0.16% and 2.82%. Detailed statistics confirming both interpretations can be found in Appendix I.

Table 11: Linear regression results of H12

Hypothesis 12	Total R^2	Adjusted R^2	F statistics	Sig.
Model H12	0.013	0.010	4.858	0.028
	B	**Sig.**		
(Constant)	1.783	0.00		
EWOMnegative	0.149	0.028		

Source: own work.
Note: dependent variable – EFFECTlow, predictors: (Constant), EWOMnegative; N=371.

(5) Differences between generational cohorts

H13: *Attitudes towards influencer content differ among the generational cohorts.*

An Independent–Samples T–test was conducted to compare attitudes of Gen Y and Gen Z. Based on Table 12 we can conclude that attitudes between Gen Y and Gen Z differ on some metrics. There was no significant difference in scores for the credibility driver (p=0.939, two–tailed), self–identification driver (p=0.235, two–tailed) or the number of followers

driver (p=0.880, two–tailed). On contrary, in terms of the entertainment driver we can conclude that attitudes of Gen Y and Gen Z significantly differ (p=0.03, two–tailed). The entertainment value of influencers is a stronger driver for Gen Z (M=4.35, SD=0.652) than it is for Gen Y (M=4.10, SD=0.740). 95.1% of Gen Zs agree or strongly agree they would follow an influencer if the content would be entertaining or funny, whereas slightly less Gen Ys (82%) agree with this statement.

There was no significant statistical difference in terms of the preferred content type. Video is the first choice for 41.9% Gen Ys and 54.4% Gen Zs. However, there are some statistically significant differences when examining the popularity of other content types. Photo with text is more popular with Gen Z (M=2.38, SD=1.058) than with Gen Y (M=2.69, SD=1.076), which is true at a low significance level (p=0.11, two–tailed). A typical example of this content type includes memes from the platform 9gag, shared on numerous platforms, as well as motionless Snapchat or Instagram stories. It may also be observed that Gen Y (M=4.00, SD=1.284) is more fond of long text blog entries than Gen Z (M=4.31, SD=1.213) is. This difference between cohorts was proven statistically significant as well (p=0.037, two–tailed).

Table 12: Independent Samples T–Test results for H13

Attitudes	Mean		t	df	Sig. (2–tailed)	Mean Difference
	Gen Y	**Gen Z**				
Credibility	3.89	3.89	0.077	373	0.939	0.004
Self–identification	3.75	3.85	-1.189	373	0.235	-0.10437
Entertainment	**4.10**	**4.35**	-3.017	373	**0.03**	-0.250
Nr. of followers	2.55	2.53	0.152	373	0.880	0.1504
Preferred CT	2.33	2.10	1.416	373	0.157	0.234
BSC tolerate	3.42	3.47	-0.603	372	0.547	-0.049
BSC trust	2.72	2.71	0.120	373	0.904	0.012
BSC transparent	**4.22**	**3.83**	3.414	373	**0.001**	0.399

Source: own work.
Note: On all variables N(Gen Y)=272 and N(Gen Z)=103, except from variable BSC tolerate, where N(Gen Y)=271.

The generational cohorts share their attitudes towards trust and tolerance of BSC. However, as shown in Table 12, it is proven they feel differently about transparency of BSC of influencers. 84.9% of representatives of Gen Y (M=4.22) agree or strongly agree that all BSC of influencers should be clearly marked, while less Gen Zs (M=3.83) believe the same,

accounting for 70.9%. To sum up, H13 can be confirmed, since differences in attitudes between generational cohorts exist on certain parameters.

H14: *Behaviour towards influencer content differ among the generational cohorts.*

Based on the results presented in Table 13, H14 needs to be rejected. None of the parameters measuring behaviour of young consumers towards influencer content showed a significant statistical difference between Gen Y and Gen Z. Therefore, it can be claimed that behaviour towards BSC of influencers between Gen Y and Gen Z are the same.

Table 13: Independent Samples T–Test results for H13

Behaviour	Mean		t	df	Sig. (2–tailed)	Mean Difference
	Gen Y	**Gen Z**				
Active engagement	1.98 (N=269)	2.04 (N=101)	-1.118	368	0.264	-0.06562
Incentives	1.96 (N=257)	2.15 (N=99)	-1.768	149.395	0.079	-0.18595
Invasiveness	3.24 (N=272)	3.09 (N=103)	1.410	373	0.160	0.15343

Source: own work.
Note: N(Gen Y, active engagement)=269, N(Gen Z, active engagement)=101, N(Gen Y, incentives)=257, N(Gen Z, incentives)= 99, N(Gen Y, invasiveness)=272, N(Gen Z, invasiveness)=103.

6   DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Finally yet importantly, it is crucial to place the results of this research in a broader marketing context. The purpose of this chapter is to link the new findings on attitudes and behaviour of young Slovenian consumers towards influencer content to theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, a summary of the tested hypotheses is provided in Appendix J. Secondly, in the theoretical implications, the research questions will be answered. Thirdly, practical implications will be discussed.

6.1   Theoretical implications

Before turning towards the research questions, it would be sensible to reflect on who typically follows influencer content. The followers compared to the non–followers appear

to be younger and in majority belonging to generations under examination, namely Gen Y and Gen Z. Importantly, a third of individuals belonging to Gen Y do not follow influencers content and therefore fall out of influencer marketing imperatives. Followers are frequent SMP users, engaging in Facebook, YouTube and Instagram daily, mainly using those for time–filling or time–killing. They perceive SMPs as a diverse hub for searching after new ideas, trends and inspiration.

(1) What drives young Slovenian consumers to follow influencer content?

In Slovenia, the most essential driver to follow influencer content among young consumers is the entertainment value of a particular influencer. Therefore, their primary expectation toward influencer content is that it entertains them, which corresponds well to the findings by Taylor, Lewin and Strutton (2011), who show that constant entertainment is the key motivator for compelling digital content; nevertheless, boredom is one of the main antecedents for SMP usage. Next, young consumers feel credibility of content and identification with its creator are also important drivers for following. Since consumers admit they tend to gather around similar interests, this implies that influencers are generators of new online communities, which are composed of their followers. In fact, Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Uzunoglu and Kip (2014) already discussed this theory in the literature; the first by defending scepticism and the second being more in favour of the interpretation of the presented outcomes.

The results on credibility, based on the component matrix of the Factor loading analysis, have suggested that influencers can be held credible for two different reasons. Firstly, they are trusted because they are perceived to be successful in their field of expertise and because they are able to provide, teach and share their knowledge in an informative and credible way. Secondly, they are perceived as credible because they express certain passion about their topic of interest and because their opinions are seen as honest and authentic. Of course, one influencer can share both characteristics, expertise and authenticity. However, keeping in mind the most popular influencers of today, qualitative research suggest that it seems to be more common to distinguish between both types of influencers and label them. The suggestion would be to define the first group as (1) specialists, who have knowledge about a certain field of interest and are informative, seen as very successful and frequently provide educational content (examples: fitness professionals, yoga teachers, automotive enthusiasts, public policy commentators, vegetarian cooks etc.). The second group is labelled as (2) attractive personalities, who drive followers because of their compelling lifestyle, enthusiastic and passionate behaviour, who are usually very charismatic and are talented storytellers (examples: lifestyle bloggers, parenting bloggers, travel bloggers etc.).

Lastly, a high number of followers did not prove to be a deciding driver, which would persuade users to follow certain influencer. Two reasons may be extracted out of this result. The first is that consumers might simply be indifferent towards the number of followers, since it does not tell them much. The second might be, on the grounds of recent affairs, where influencer profiles were buying fake followers in order to appear credible. This is why high numbers are questionable, as suggested by an in–depth interview respondent. Therefore, results of this study differ from outcomes implied in the theoretical overview.

(2) What type of content are young Slovenian consumers influenced by?

The most compelling format among young Slovenian users is proven to be video. It is evident from the results that consumers prefer influencer content which consists of videos as it is true for YouTube channels, Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories, and Snapchat. Videos can be used as newsfeed posts on Instagram and Facebook as well. Photo based content, as the second most favourable format, can be used on every SMP. However, photos represent the fundamental type of content on Instagram and Pinterest. Photos combined with text, especially in the form of memes, are frequently shared on Facebook, Snapchat, and Pinterest, while an exemplary form of short text called microblogging can be found on Twitter. Long texts are usually not used on SMPs, except for occasional long Facebook posts or ordinary blogs on Tumblr or LinkedIn. These findings can be convincingly linked to the list of most frequently used SMPs, which were observed in the descriptive part of chapter 5. Moreover, the findings correlate with suggestions from researchers abroad (eMarketer inc, 2016c; Nations, 2017; Smith, 2012).

(3) How are young Slovenian consumers engaging with BSC of influencers?

In terms of engagement, both qualitative and quantitative results of this research show that consumers are mostly passive observers and in–takers of content as opposed to actively engaged in its distribution. They are most likely to press like, while of all possible engagement actions, consumers are least likely to comment. This holds for positive attitudes towards influencer content, as well as for negative attitudes. Combining these results with discussions from qualitative research, it appears to be true, that young consumers tend to browse through content most of the time. Engagement appears to be rare, although content is likeable. It may increase when engaging with content of personally related connections (as are family and close friends). If consumers detect something exceptional, they would consider sharing such content privately, saving it to bookmarks or even talk about them offline. The frequency of liking and commenting seems to be connected to the character of a specific person, since no trends can be derived from research. However, it might also hold

that followers in Slovenia do not feel addressed as members of certain influencer communities (Yeh & Choi, 2011).

The results made evident that incentives do not motivate consumers to engage with content either. Indeed, mostly they tend to ignore these promotion tactics and focus on the content they were initially looking for. Qualitative research suggest this arises because the volume of such advertising is too frequent and too big. Awards are therefore becoming easier to attain and less appealing (Smith, 2012). On the other hand, it is evident that consumers tolerate BSC, because it became everyday practice, but they do not tend to trust BSC much. The reason lies in the doubt towards its credibility. On average, consumers tend to drive away from content that is perceived to be too invasive or keep an indifferent posture. However, consumers feel strong about transparency of BSC. The vast majority of consumers agree or strongly agree with the statement that all BSC would need to be clearly marked. Once more, it can be confirmed that consumers desire direct and transparent digital advertising (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017).

(4) How does active engagement in eWOM affect brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase of young Slovenian consumers?

Results of the linear regression analysis showed that positive eWOM is an important predictor of brand awareness, affinity, loyalty increase and of a stronger intent to purchase. This implies that if a consumer increases his or her rate of positive eWOM, it will increase his or her brand awareness or purchase intent of the brand. Although, a positive relation was found between negative eWOM and less–favourable effects of lower brand affinity, loyalty and purchase intent, the results imply that the decrease of brand loyalty or the purchase intent would be minimal, even though a consumer's rate of negative eWOM would increase. Therefore, we can conclude that negative consequences of unfavourable advertising are far smaller compared to the positive opportunities which favourable content can provide.

(5) Do Slovenian generation Y and generation Z consumers have different attitudes or behaviour towards BSC of influencers?

This research showed that attitudes and behaviours of generation Y and generation Z are fairly similar. Gen Z shares their perceptions with Gen Y except in terms of the entertainment value and transparency of BSC. Namely, the entertainment value is a stronger driver for following than it is for Gen Y. This can be confirmed with findings from in–depth interviews, where both representatives of Gen Z frequently mentioned the importance of entertainment. On the other hand, Gen Z appears to be more indifferent about transparency of sponsored posts, while Gen Y feels very strongly about it.

Although attitudes towards video content are similar for both cohorts, Gen Z expresses a stronger preference for memes than Gen Y does, while Gen Y is more fond of longer blog entries, although it is at the bottom of their preferences. The preference of memes might be explained by the more extensive use of Snapchat among Gen Z, since Snapchat posts typically combine photos with funny texts. No difference could be found in terms of behaviour. However, this might be a result of the focus of this paper, which analysed attitudes in more detailed than behaviour.

6.2   Practical implications

Additionally, this research was conducted with practical implications in mind. Understanding the attitudes and behaviour of consumers towards influencer content is crucial for marketers in order to optimize their digital campaigns accordingly. The main proposition of this research to marketing practitioners is that influencer marketing should be exploited as a tool to target younger audiences, especially Gen Y and Gen Z, because they are the most frequent users of SMP, which they also utilize to follow influencers, brands and celebrities.

Firstly, the outcomes show that credibility of sponsored posts is doubted. This does not suggest that advertising through influencers is ineffective, since the opposite appears to be true. It is only a call towards a reconsideration of influencer marketing practices. Instead of detecting influencers with a wide following crowd, marketers should find those influencers who are natural brand enthusiasts and reward them for their loyalty. Long–term relationships will appear less doubtful. Solis (2017) argues that it would be more beneficial for marketers if they employ tighter relationships with their potential brand endorsers. He suggests companies invite them to become a part of the product development process, gaining relevant feedback from a user, who is passionate or educated in the same field, and getting positive eWOM due to his storytelling techniques. Focusing on transparent sponsored advertising via influencers is crucial, since young consumers are fast at detecting deceptive advertising. SNA should be direct, honest and transparent and marketers should expect nothing less from their influencers. As Weber argues (2009, p. 36), digital marketing is not only about 'getting your story out', but should also aim to earn trust and build credibility.

Secondly, practitioners should stick to the principle that quality rules over quantity. Incentives are ignored and disliked, because marketers use too many. Therefore, this thesis suggests using less of these initiatives. Additionally, consumers do not feel impressed by a high number of followers, while marketers should not either. After a minimum benchmark is set, marketers should focus more on expertise and authenticity of the influencer and try to

find out, which content would benefit their brand most. Furthermore, self–identification is one of the most important drivers for following content, which means followers share influencers' thoughts, views and interests. Mostly this holds because they look up to them, and would desire to have a similar lifestyle. Thus, it can be concluded that an influencer already tells a lot about his or her target audience, which is comprised of the followers.

Thirdly, active engagement of young consumers appears to be more of a rare occasion than regular practice. However, this does not mean that consumers do not receive the advertising message. Young consumers tend to browse through content a lot and even though it is difficult to write a successful guide of tactics, which would work to grab their attention and make them engage, video is the content type to exploit. Consumers admit, it captures their attention quicker than a picture and often successfully transmits the message (Weber, 2009). Moreover, qualitative research suggests they seem to be more personal. Therefore, video views should be a more important indicator than likes and comments of BSC.

Lastly, if the campaign goals were to address specifically Gen Z representatives, it would be strongly advised to use humour and entertainment in the specific marketing strategies, since it is the most influential driver to catch their eye. In digital marketing it is important to precisely segment the target audiences. If marketers want to perform their strategies successfully, they should not be afraid to have some fun, while playing on the turf of Gen Z.

7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research encountered some limitations that should be considered when interpreting and studying the results. Firstly, some measurement scales could be additionally optimized. The lack of items could cause that some of the conclusions are biased, because not all the parameters could be encountered for. Moreover, no additional casual relationships could be established with the given variable set.

However, if the first limitation would be overcome, then this thesis could not be as broad in its research subject. Because broad research goals were set, some of the concepts were considered from a non–holistic point of view. It would be suggested that future research focuses on attitudes, behaviours, drivers and effects separately. In addition, different distinctions of Gen Y and Gen Z had been tested, changing the starting years from 1996 to 1995 for Gen Z, since categorization into cohorts in literature is not uniform. Still, many of scholars and authors (Brauer, 2018; Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; Claveria, 2017; Nielsen, 2015; Özkan & Solmaz, 2017) in the social media research field argue in favour of 1996 as the starting year of Gen Z. In order for this thesis to be relatable, the same categorization

was used. Nevertheless, even the slightest differences were found to change some of the results. Therefore, the adopted distinction of which representatives are labelled as Y or Z might bias the outcomes of the study.

Additionally, potential bias might arise based on two demographic statistics of the sample. Since the vast majority of the respondents currently live in Gorenjska or Osrednjeslovenska region, some other regions are underrepresented in the analysis. Outcomes may differ from the presented results if the sample would be geographically more balanced. Moreover, in the analysed sample gender disbalance can be observed. The vast majority of the respondents were female, suggesting that a more gender–balanced sample might show different outcomes on some indicators. However, this thesis did not observe the differences between gender–based attitudes; therefore this might present a possible topic for future research.

Furthermore, as current research on influencer marketing in Slovenia is limited, future researchers could focus on a number striking research topics. To name a few, research in the future should analyse the influencer's point of view, with a focus on practices of partnerships with brands as well as influencer–follower relations. A comparison of long–term and short–term influencer partnership practices would make a compelling longitudinal study. Moreover, perceptions on different types of BSC invasiveness can be examined, while comparing marked and unmarked BSC or direct–monetary and indirect–monetary sponsorships.

CONCLUSION

With the rapid evolvement of digital marketing, continuous changes in SMP features and the dynamic behaviour of internet users, marketers need to follow new technologies in the digital landscape on a daily basis, in order to keep up with the pace of new trends. Currently, influencer marketing is the fastest growing digital marketing practice, which developed on the grounds of effectiveness of content marketing and eWOM generation, therefore this research aimed at discovering the influencer marketing sphere in Slovenia. Practices of young consumers continue to be of strong interest to marketers, since they are an insightful forecast for how the next generation will tend to distribute their disposable income. This thesis focused on attitudes and behaviour of Gen Y and Gen Z, analysing them as a holistic group of young consumers, as well as differentiating between both cohort representatives in order to compare them.

This thesis was successful in reflecting the findings found in foreign literature on the Slovenian market. The majority of findings supported past research conducted abroad.

Moreover, this research presents an updated model of the process that leads young consumers to follow influencer content and engage in eWOM. It portrays key drivers for motivating consumers to follow influencer content, tests the preferred types of content, and provides insights on the impacts that influencer content has on consumers. Perceptions towards BSC of influencers were determined as well. Furthermore, it discovers that eWOM generated through BSC of influencers affects certain outcomes like brand awareness, affinity, loyalty and the intent to purchase. However, the exact causalities and details of this relation need to be further examined. Additionally, by conducting quantitative and qualitative research, some differences were found between the attitudes of both generational cohorts under examination, namely Gen Y and Gen Z, which rest on the importance of the entertainment value as a driver towards following influencer content and the attitudes towards BSC.

In conclusion, this thesis develops theoretical as well as practical implications for future research and practice. To theorists, it provides a new measurement scale for analysing BSC attitudes, suggests the distinction of influencers on the basis of consumer attitudes and perceptions, and provides fundamental analysis of influencer marketing in Slovenia. To practitioners, it provides insights on consumer behaviour for optimizing advertising campaigns of influencer marketing. It calls for a reconsideration of influence marketing practices and suggests tighter and long–term partnerships with perspective influencers. Lastly, it demonstrates that in influencer marketing, quality of content surpasses quantity, and therefore transparency of sponsored partnership should be executed thoroughly in order to build an honest relationship with the targeted audiences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Summary in Slovenian

Razvoj digitalnega prostora je med drugim vplival tudi na vedenjske navade potrošnikov, na njihovo dojemanje, izbor in odnos do informacij ter posledično na nastanek novih marketinških orodij, ki so se tem spremembam prilagodila (Weber, 2009). Ker je z razvojem spleta vpliv začel prehajati med različnimi ustvarjalci digitalnih vsebin, so potrošniki sami postali tisti, ki lahko uspešno širijo ime blagovne znamke, produkta ali podjetja (Weber, 2009, p. 102). Na takšen način je vsebina, ki jo ustvarjajo uporabniki sami (UUV), postala vplivno marketinško orodje za doseganje mlajših ciljnih skupin, ki te vsebine redno spremljajo na različnih platformah družabnih omrežij (PDO) (Smith, 2012; Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011). V zadnjih letih lahko na globalni ravni spremljamo vse bolj tesno sodelovanje med posameznimi podjetji, organizacijami in agencijami na eni strani ter vplivneži z družabnih omrežij, ki aktivno iščejo ustvarjalne in učinkovite načine digitalnega oglaševanja, na drugi strani. Digitalni vplivnež je uporabnik PDO, ki je s svojim profilom ustvaril široko spletno skupnost sledilcev, ki spremlja njegove objave iz osebnih ali profesionalnih razlogov. Spletene digitalne vezi gradijo premise realnega prijateljstva na podlagi izmenjave skupnih interesov in izkušenj, ki ustvarjajo družbeni kapital (Solis, 2017, p. 11).

Poslovno sodelovanje z vplivneži sodi pod vplivnostni in vsebinski marketing. Gre za nepromocijski pristop k trženju, pri katerem blagovne znamke usmerijo svoja prizadevanja v spletne mnenjske voditelje. Le–ti ustvarijo sponzorirano vsebino, kar je v nasprotju z običajno prakso neposrednega nagovarjanja ciljnih skupin (Hall, 2016). Gre torej za obliko indirektnega oglaševanja (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017). Vplivnostni in vsebinski marketing sta podzvrst digitalnega marketinga. Pri slednjem gre za prakso oglaševanja produktov in storitev prek digitalnih distribucijskih kanalov, do katerih uporabniki dostopajo prek svojega računalnika, pametnega telefona in drugih digitalnih naprav (Smith, 2012, p. 86). Omenjeni digitalni marketinški pristopi ne spreminjajo načina ustvarjanja, dekodiranja ali izmenjavanja informacij, temveč preoblikujejo razmišljanje blagovnih znamk o ciljnih trgih in njihovo razumevanje ključnih potrošnikov (Solis, 2009).

Dokaz učinkovitosti digitalnega marketinga je podatek, da je v letu 2017 oglaševalski proračun, namenjen digitalnim kanalom, presegel TV oglaševanje (Kafka & Molla, 2017); ta trend naj bi se v naslednjih letih še okrepil (eMarketer.com, 2016a). V Sloveniji so oglaševalci za digitalni marketing v letu 2017 skupno namenili 47,2 milijona €, kar nakazuje, da so naložbe v primerjavi z letom poprej zrasle za 18% (Marketing magazin, 2018). Kljub temu pa je delež naložb v digitalni marketing znotraj celotnega oglaševalskega proračuna manjši, kot je praksa v tujini (IAB Slovenija, 2017). Ključne prednosti digitalnega

marketinga so natančna merljivost ključnih kazalnikov uspešnosti, možnost preciznega ciljanja in enostavnost, s katero se lahko ustvarijo, objavijo in izmenjujejo vsebine (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014; Weber, 2009). Kljub vsemu morajo tržniki paziti na primerno komunikacijo vsebine, saj mladi potrošniki in uporabniki spleta klasične digitalne formate oglaševanja dojemajo kot invazivne (Smith, 2012, p. 89), ker ovirajo njihovo ciljno naravnano uporabo digitalnih vsebin (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011, p. 263). Zato učinkovit digitalni marketing stavi na personalizacijo in lagodnost oglaševane vsebine, ki ima tudi uporabno vrednost za uporabnika (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016; Duffet, 2015; Nielsen, 2015).

Raziskave globalnega trga kažejo (eMarketer.com, 2016b), da v letu 2018 69,8% spletnih uporabnikov redno uporablja PDO. PDO so postale primarni kanal za vzpostavljanje odnosov med mlajšimi potrošniki, predvsem predstavniki generacije Y in generacije Z, in blagovnimi znamkami (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 67), saj omenjena ciljna skupina tam išče zabavo, informacije, novice in druženje (Jin & Phua, 2014; Tanyel, Stuart & Griffin, 2013; Smith, 2012; Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011; Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Po mnenju generacije Y in Z so mnenja vrstnikov in souporabnikov PDO bolj verodostojna in zanesljiva kot pa ocene anonimnih uporabnikov oziroma priporočila institucionaliziranih entitet (Chatterjee, 2011; Chu & Kim, 2011; Nielsen, 2015), zato oglaševalci za vzpostavljanje avtentičnega stika s svojimi potencialnimi potrošniki uporabljajo PDO (Weber, 2009, p. 217). Vplivneži so s specifičnimi interesi in osebnostmi prek svojih profilov ustvarili spletne skupnosti, ki jih dojemajo kot zgled in verodostojen vir informacij, saj se z njimi zlahka poistovetijo (Solis, 2009; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

Vplivneži, ki objavljajo UUV, uživajo ustrezen ugled in imajo moč, da učinkovito širijo tako imenovano elektronsko ustno izročilo (EUI), ki ga uporabniki sprejemajo, dokler dojemajo vsebino kot kredibilno (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). 66% potrošnikov namreč priznava, da verjame v iskrenost takšne vsebine (Nielsen, 2015). EUI uporabniki lahko ustvarijo načrtno, s pisanjem in ustvarjanjem digitalnih objav na PDO, ali nenačrtno, prek všečkanja, komentiranja ali deljenja določene vsebine, ki razkriva njihovo afiniteto do določene znamke tudi prijateljem (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Študije so dokazale, da pozitivna EUI vzpodbudno vpliva tudi na zavedanje in zvestobo določeni blagovni znamki ter nakupni namen potrošnikov (Balakrishnan, Dahnili & Yi, 2014; Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015; Mutum & Wang, 2010). Zato so indikatorji EUI postali ključni kazatelji uspešnosti digitalnih kampanj (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017).

Raziskave v tujini kažejo, da 61% oglaševalcev trenutno sodeluje z digitalnimi vplivneži, medtem ko se 92% vprašanih strinja, da je promocija prek digitalnih vplivnežev pomembna

ali nujna (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017), saj se je to orodje izkazalo za zelo dobičkonosno (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017; Tomoson, 2015). Prav tako se v veliki meri poslužujejo oglaševanja prek video–vsebin. Mlajši potrošniki so namreč izkazali večji interes za spremljanje video–formata, kar se kaže tudi v visokem razmerju med kliki in prikazi spletnih video–vsebin (eMarketer.com, 2016c; Halliday, 2016, p. 143; WhoSay, 2017). Format oglaševanja pa še zdaleč ni edini indikator dobre vsebine, ki ji je vredno slediti. Znanstveniki dokazujejo, da ima vpliv zgolj vsebina, ki jo potrošniki dojemajo kot kredibilno, kar pomeni, da mora vzbujati zaupanje (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017), prikazati avtentičnost (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009) in znanje oziroma ustrezno poznavanje določenega področja (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015). Nadalje naj bi potrošnike pritegnila identifikacija s samim vplivnežem na podlagi interesov ter življenjskega sloga (Chu & Kim, 2011) in zabavnost njegove ali njene vsebine (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani & Sali, 2016). Nekatere študije kažejo tudi na to, da ima število sledilcev, s katerim se ponaša vplivnež, prav tako pomembno vlogo pri odločitvi, ali je vsebini vredno slediti (Jin & Phua, 2014).

Ker potrošniki niso homogena skupina ljudi, saj se razlikujejo na podlagi želja in interesov, morajo strategije digitalnega oglaševanja predvideti ustrezno segmentacijo potrošnikov (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004). Pričujoča raziskovalna naloga se osredotoča na mlajše potrošnike, natančneje na dve generacijski skupini. Generacijo Y ali milenijce sestavljajo posamezniki, ki so rojeni med letoma 1980 in 1995 (Claveria, 2017). Obkroženi s hitro razvijajočimi se elektronskimi tehnologijami so odrasli v času vse večje zasičenosti medijev in instantne globalne komunikacije (Barbagallo, 2003) ter trenutno uživajo največjo kupno moč (Hyllegard, Yan, Ogle & Attmaann, 2011; Nielsen, 2015; Smith, 2012). Generacija Z je skupina najmlajših potrošnikov, rojenih od vključno leta 1996 dalje (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017; Claveria, 2017), ki kažejo podobna prepričanja in vedenja kot njihovi predhodniki, a so le–ta intenzivnejša (Kane, 2017). Medtem ko je generacija Y odraščala hkrati z razvojem digitalnih tehnologij, si generacija Z ne predstavlja časa pred internetom, saj so jim njegovi derivati dnevno dostopni prek pametnih telefonov (Kane, 2017; Özkan & Solmaz, 2017). Ves čas so povezani s svojimi kontakti prek družabnih omrežij, iščejo zabavno vsebino in razumejo, da ima vsak možnost ustvarjanja spletnih vsebin (Desai & Lele, 2017; Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin & Rumpel, 2011). V povprečju so rojeni starejšim staršem (Desai & Lele, 2017), so bolj cenovno občutljivi, ker še ne uživajo rednega lastnega prihodka (Claveria, 2017) in bolj skeptični do digitalnega oglaševanja (Celebrity Intelligence, 2017).

Namen te raziskovalne naloge je identificirati stališča in vedenja generacij Y in Z v Sloveniji do sponzoriranih vsebin digitalnih vplivnežev. Cilj raziskave je torej poglobiti razumevanje procesa, ki mlade potrošnike v Sloveniji spodbudi k sledenju UUV in interakciji v okviru

EUI. Rezultati raziskave bodo pomagali določiti ključne indikatorje, ki pripomorejo k odločitvi, ali je določeni vsebini digitalnih vplivnežev vredno slediti ali ne. Prav tako želim ugotoviti, kako pozitivno in negativno usmerjen EUI vpliva na željene posledice oglaševanja, ki jih potrošniki izražajo v obliki zavedanja o blagovni znamki, afinitete in zvestobe do blagovne znamke ter nakupnega namena. Poleg tega v raziskovalni nalogi preverjam, ali pri stališčih in vedenjskih navadah v okviru digitalne vsebine vplivnežev prihaja do razlik med obema generacijskima skupinama, in rezultate primerjam z izsledki podobnih raziskav, opravljenih v tujini.

Magistrsko nalogo sestavljata teoretični in empirični del. V prvih treh poglavjih sem se osredotočila na pregled literature in ključnih konceptov, ki so pomembni za razumevanje postavljenega cilja raziskovalne naloge in njenih rezultatov. Obsegajo pregled razvoja digitalnega marketinga, vlogo PDO, pomen UUV ter EUI, pregled učinkovitosti vplivnostnega marketinga in formatov sponzorirane vsebine. V teoretičnem delu sem definirala obe generacijski skupini ter ju med seboj primerjala. Empirični del je prav tako sestavljen iz treh poglavij. Predstavlja okvir raziskovalne metodologije in razvoj hipotez, analizo in rezultate ter diskusijo, ki definira praktične in teoretične doprinose pričujoče magistrske naloge.

Za izvedbo raziskovalnega dela sem se poslužila kvalitativnih in kvantitativnih raziskovalnih tehnik. Kvalitativni del raziskave temelji na štirih globinskih intervjujih z dvema predstavnikoma generacije Y in dvema predstavnikoma generacije Z. Kvalitativni izsledki so služili za preverjanje kvalitete zastavljenega vprašalnika ter globlje razumevanje dobljenih kvantitativnih rezultatov. Ogrodje kvantitativne raziskave je bil anketni vprašalnik, sestavljen iz obstoječih in posodobljenih merskih lestvic. Raziskava je bila izvedena prek spletnega portala 1ka med 13. in 18. julijem 2018. Povezava do spletne ankete je bila objavljena na različnih družabnih omrežjih (Facebook, Instagram in Twitter) in podkrepljena s kratko video–vsebino, ki je razlagala ključne koncepte in nagovarjala k izpolnitvi anketnega vprašalnika. Anketo je rešilo 788 uporabnikov, od katerih sem po izbrisu polovično rešenih vprašalnikov izluščila 642 veljavnih in uporabnih vnosov, ki sem jih razdelila na 232 nesledilcev in 410 uporabnikov, ki redno sledi vsebinam vplivnežev. Izmed slednjih je 375 uporabnikov sodilo v generacijo Y ali generacijo Z, zato so ti sestavljali glavni vzorec raziskave.

Pridobljene kvantitativne podatke sem analizirala s pomočjo programskega orodja IBM SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences) Statistics, verzija 22.0. V prvem koraku sem iz vzorca odstranila neprimerne in nepopolne vnose, prečistila sem podatke ter konstruirala tudi nove spremenljivke. Temu je sledilo demografsko opisovanje statistik, s pomočjo

katerega sem definirala različne skupinske vzorce (nesledilci in sledilci, generacija Y in generacija Z). Drugi korak je temeljil na deskriptivni analizi podatkov, pri kateri je bila ugotovljena pogostost in namen uporabe PDO in ki je ponudila dodaten vpogled v izražene preference po tipu in tematiki digitalnih vsebin vplivnežev. Čeprav se raziskovalna naloga osredotoča na mlade slovenske potrošnike, ki spremljajo vsebino vplivnežev, je anketni vprašalnik zajel tudi skupino predstavnikov starejših generacij in nesledilcev, ki so bili deloma vključeni v deskriptivni pregled, saj predstavljajo pomembno dodano vrednost k raziskavi. Osrednja naloga tretjega koraka je bila testiranje zastavljenih štirinajstih hipotez.

Rezultati raziskave so pokazali, da je ključni motivator za sledenje vsebini vplivnežev iskanje zabave, kar je logična posledica osnovnega izraženega namena uporabe PDO, namreč kratkočasenja. Zelo pomembna motivatorja sta tudi kredibilnost UUV in identifikacija z njenim ustvarjalcem, medtem ko je vzorec zavrnil tezo, da na odločitev o sledenju določeni vsebini vpliva tudi število že obstoječih sledilcev določenega profila. Izsledki raziskave namigujejo tudi na razmejitev med različnimi vplivneži. Zato na podlagi podatkov predlagam kategorizacijo vplivnežev na (1) strokovnjake, ki sledilce prepričajo s svojim znanjem, profesionalnim uspehom in informativnostjo, ter (2) privlačne osebnosti, ki jih sledilci spremljajo zaradi zanimivega načina življenja, karizme ter navdušenosti in strasti, ki jo izkazujejo do določene tematike. Za najbolj populiaren format digitalne vsebine so uporabniki generacij Y in Z izbrali video, ki podpira privlačnost najpogosteje uporabljenih PDO. Kljub temu pa so tako kvalitativni kot kvantitativni podatki pokazali, da so uporabniki po večini pasivni opazovalci in sledilci vsebine, saj so aktivne interakcije z vsebino redke. V večini primerov pogosto brskajo po digitalni vsebini vplivnežev, a svojo navdušenost nad vsebino redko izrazijo javno, kar velja tako za pozitivne kot negativne odzive. Če pride do interakcije, gre največkrat za všečkanje, medtem ko se uporabniki najmanjkrat odločijo za komentiranje ali deljenje vsebine. Kvalitativna raziskava je potrdila kvantitativne izsledke in obrazložila, da so digitalne vsebine večkrat tudi del osebnih dvostranskih pogovorov med prijatelji.

Spodbude v obliki sponzoriranih nagradnih iger in tako imenovanih »give–away« aktivacij v povprečju ne motivirajo uporabnikov k interakcijam, saj so se takšne vsebine v preteklosti preveč razširile med UUV. Med drugim so mlajši potrošniki v Sloveniji izkazali močno preferenco po transparentnosti sponzoriranih partnerstev med podjetji in vplivneži. Sponzorirano vsebino tolerirajo, vendar ji večinoma ne zaupajo, predvsem če je le–te preveč ali pa presodijo, da informacija ni predana na kredibilen način. Ti rezultati nakazujejo, da je oblika partnerstva z vplivneži za oglaševalce izrednega pomena. Pomembno je, da podjetje za svoj obraz izbere vplivneža, ki se lahko poistoveti z vrednotami znamke in jih zna v primernem tonu komunicirati dalje. Dolgoročna partnerstva med vplivneži in blagovnimi

znamkami so pričakovan trend prihodnosti (Solis, 2017).

Rezultati so pokazali, da je EUI na podlagi UUV digitalnih vplivnežev pomemben prognostik za zavedanje, afiniteto in zvestobo določeni blagovni znamki ter nakupnega namena. Izkazalo se je, da ima pozitiven EUI močnejšo korelacijo s pozitivnimi posledicami vplivnostnega marketinga kot pa negativen EUI z negativnimi posledicami. Na podlagi te ugotovitve lahko zaključimo, da so negativne posledice oglaševanja prek digitalnih vplivnežev mnogo manjše kot pozitivne posledice, zato se investicije v vplivnostni marketing tudi v Sloveniji na splošno obrestujejo.

Med generacijama Y in Z ni bilo opaženih statistično značilnih vedenjskih razlik, se pa v določenih pogledih razlikujejo stališča do vsebin vplivnežev. Generaciji Z je zabava mnogo pomembnejši motivator za sledenje vsebini kot generaciji Y. Medtem ko generacija Y meni, da je transparentnost sponzorirane vsebine nujna, je generacija Z do tega vprašanja bolj brezbrižna. Testi ostalih indikatorjev so pokazali, da so predstavniki obeh generacij razvili podobna stališča do UUV digitalnih vplivnežev. Prav tako lahko v rezultatih raziskave najdemo jasne vzporednice z izsledki raziskav v tujini.

Na podlagi pridobljenih podatkov pričujoča raziskava predstavlja tako praktičen kot teoretičen doprinos k razvoju vplivnostnega marketinga v Sloveniji. Poleg vpogleda v odločitvene procese, dojemanje in vedenje mlajših potrošnikov v Sloveniji predstavlja predlog posodobljene merske lestvice za merjenje stališč do sponzorirane digitalne vsebine in sugestijo za diferenciacijo vplivnežev na podlagi percepcij uporabnikov. Tržnikom ponuja vpogled v razmišljanje mlajših potrošnikov ter razvija predloge za optimizacijo digitalnih oglaševalskih kampanj, ki delno ali popolnoma temeljijo na vplivnostnem marketingu. Na podlagi izsledkov raziskave je priporočljivo razmisliti o obstoječih praksah digitalnega marketinga ter o smiselnosti in pomembnosti uspešnega ciljnega nagovarjanja ključnih potrošniških skupin s pomočjo medijev, ki so jim blizu. Magistrska naloga je dokaz, da uporabniki zahtevajo in iščejo kakovostno vsebino tudi na digitalnih medijih. To pomeni, da ima kvalitetna in premišljena digitalna oglaševalska vsebina večji vpliv od kontinuiranega komuniciranja v klasičnih digitalnih formatih, ki uporabniku ne ponujajo dodane vrednosti. Hkrati je ta magistrska naloga tudi klic po preglednem, poštenem in transparentnem sponzoriranju UUV, saj je to temelj za razvoj iskrenega odnosa z analiziranimi mlajšimi ciljnimi skupinami prek vsebin digitalnih vplivnežev.

Appendix B: Glossary

From	To
attitude	stališče
behaviour	vedenje
brand awareness	zavedanje o blagovni znamki
brand loyalty	zvestoba blagovni znamki
brand–sponsored content	sponzorirana vsebina
click–through rate	razmerje med kliki in prikazi
consumer–brand relationship	odnos med potrošniki in blagovnimi znamkami
content marketing	vsebinski marketing
digital marketing	digitalni marketing
electronic word–of–mouth (eWOM)	elektronsko ustno izročilo (EUI)
followers	sledilci
influencers	vplivneži
influencer marketing	vplivnostni marketing
online community	spletna skupnost
purchase intent	nakupni namen
social media	družabna omrežja
social media platforms (SMP)	platforme družabnih omrežij (PDO)
user–generated content (UGC)	uporabniško ustvarjena vsebina (UUV)

Appendix C: Survey

Odnos slovenskih potrošnikov do vsebin vplivnežev na družabnih omrežjih

Živjo, moje ime je Eva in zaključujem študij mednarodnega magistrskega programa Poslovodenje in organizacija (International Full Time Master Program In Business Administration – IMB) na Ekonomski fakulteti vLjubljani. V okviru magistrske naloge pod mentorstvom doc. Tamare Pavasović Trošt, PhD, raziskujem področje vplivnostnega marketinga oziroma t. i.»influencerjev« in primerjam, kako se uporabniki odzivamo na njihove bloggerske vsebine. Ta vprašalnik vam bo vzel približno 7-10 minut vašega časa. Vaši vnosi so popolnoma anonimni, podatki pa bodo uporabljeni izključno v raziskovalne namene. Za sodelovanje se vam že vnaprej zahvaljujem.

Q1 (*Uvod*): Ali ste registrirani na katerem izmed družabnih omrežij (npr. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat ipd.)?

◯ Da
◯ Ne

Sledita dve kratki vprašanji o vaši uporabi družabnih omrežij.

Q2 (*Uporaba*): Kako pogosto uporabljate spodaj našteta družabna omrežja? Če ste uporabnik družabnega omrežja, ki ga ni na seznamu, dopišite v polje "Drugo:". V nasprotnem primeru pustite prazno.

	nikoli	manj kot 1x na mesec	1x do 2x na mesec	1x na teden	2x do 6x na teden	1x na dan	2x do 5x na dan	6x na dan ali več
Facebook	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Instagram	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Twitter	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
YouTube	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Snapchat	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Pinterest	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

	nikoli	manj kot 1x na mesec	1x do 2x na mesec	1x na teden	2x do 6x na teden	1x na dan	2x do 5x na dan	6x na dan ali več
Drugo:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q3 (*Namen*): S kakšnim namenom uporabljate družabna omrežja?

Možnih je več odgovorov

☐ Kratkočasenje
☐ Iskanje idej / navdiha / trendov
☐ Navezovanje stikov s prijatelji
☐ Lažja komunikacija z večjo skupino ljudi
☐ Spremljanje dogodkov
☐ Spremljanje novic / informacij
☐ Sledenje znamkam
☐ Sledenje znanim osebnostim
☐ Sledenje drugim vplivnim ljudem / influencerjem
☐ Nič od naštetega
☐ Drugo:

Vplivnostni marketing na družabnih omrežjih se ukvarja s trženjem vsebin prek spletnih osebnosti, ki jim pravimo »influencerji« oz. vplivneži. Kot influencerja razumem uporabnika družabnih omrežij, ki je uveljavil svojo verodostojnost na določenem področju. Njegovim bloggerskim vsebinam sledi krog ljudi, ki presega krog njegovih prijateljev in znancev. Redno objavlja vsebino na svojem kanalu in z njo želi vplivati na širšo skupnost. Primeri influencerjev v Sloveniji: Komotar Minuta (avtomobilizem), CoolFotr (očetovstvo), Lepa afna (kozmetika), Alja Skrt (potovanja/izleti/vrtnarstvo), Tesa Jurjaševič (moda), Nives Orešnik (aktiven življenjski slog), Mariah Dolenc (lifestyle) in drugi.

Q4 (*SloTuj*): Katere influencerje (vplivneže) spremljate in/ali jim sledite?

○ Samo slovenske
○ Samo tuje
○ Slovenske in tuje
○ Tem vsebinam ne sledim

Q5 (*Kanali*): Na katerih kanalih sledite vsebinam influencerjem (vplivnežem)?

Možnih je več odgovorov

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Tem vsebinam ne sledim
- ☐ Drugo:

**Q6 (*Tematika*): O katerih tematikah govorijo influencerji (vplivneži), ki jim sledite?**

Možnih je več odgovorov

- ☐ Moda / fashion trendi
- ☐ Kozmetika / umetnost ličenja
- ☐ Avtomobilizem
- ☐ Potovanja / izleti / turizem
- ☐ Kuhanje / recepti
- ☐ Vrtnarstvo / vzgoja rastlin in vrta
- ☐ Materinstvo / očetovstvo
- ☐ Šport / aktiven življenjski slog / rekreacija
- ☐ Tehnologija
- ☐ Hišni ljubljenčki
- ☐ Fotografija / glasba / ples / film / knjige / literatura
- ☐ Informativne / izobraževalne vsebine
- ☐ Lifestyle
- ☐ Drugo:
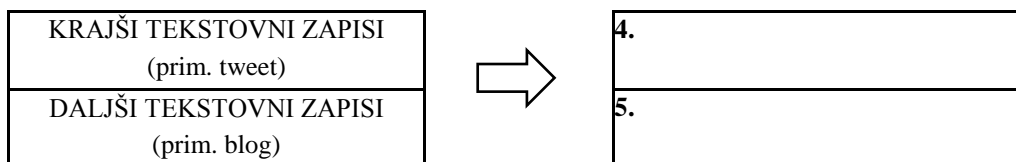
Q7 (*Oblika*): Influencerji se poslužujejo bloggerskih vsebin različnih oblik. Katera izmed spodnjih oblik vsebin najpogosteje oziroma najraje spremljate?

Razvrstite (1-5): 1 - spremljam najraje/najpogosteje, 5 - spremljam najredkeje

VIDEO (prim. YouTube objava, IG/FB story)	⟹	1.
SLIKA (prim. IG objava)		2.
SLIKA + TEKST (prim. meme)		3.

KRAJŠI TEKSTOVNI ZAPISI (prim. tweet)	⇒	4.
DALJŠI TEKSTOVNI ZAPISI (prim. blog)		5.

Q8 (*PozVseb*): Kako reagirate na vsebino influencerja (vplivneža), ki vam je všeč?

	nikoli	redko	včasih	pogosto	vedno
Všečkam / pritisnem LIKE	○	○	○	○	○
Napišem komentar pod objavo / COMMENT	○	○	○	○	○
Delim s prijatelji / SHARE	○	○	○	○	○
Shranim pod bookmarkse ali označim na podoben način	○	○	○	○	○
Naknadno preverim produkt/znamko, če jo zasledim v objavi.	○	○	○	○	○
Redno začnem slediti vsebini oz. se naročim na kanal / FOLLOW oz. SUBSCRIBE	○	○	○	○	○
Brskam po vsebini naprej, vendar ne storim ničesar	○	○	○	○	○

Q9 (*NegVseb*): Kako reagirate na vsebino influencerja (vplivneža), ki vam ni všeč?

	nikoli	redko	včasih	pogosto	vedno
Preneham slediti vsebini / UNFOLLOW	○	○	○	○	○
Blokiram vsebino	○	○	○	○	○
Napišem komentar pod objavo / COMMENT	○	○	○	○	○
Ignoriram oz. ne storim ničesar	○	○	○	○	○

Q10 (*Drivers*): Ali spodnje izjave za vas držijo? Označite na lestvici 1-5!
Influencerju/influencerki (vplivnežu) sledim, ...

Spodnje izjave niso nujno povezane zgolj z enim influencerjem, ampak so lahko povezane z različnimi.

	se nikakor ne strinjam	se ne strinjam	niti se ne strinjam, niti strinjam	se strinjam	se popolnoma strinjam
če mu/ji lahko zaupam.	○	○	○	○	○
če precenim, da ima kredibilno vsebino.	○	○	○	○	○
če menim, da je njegovo mnenje iskreno.	○	○	○	○	○
ker izkazuje strast do tematike, o kateri govori.	○	○	○	○	○
ker ima podobne interese kot jaz.	○	○	○	○	○

	se nikakor ne strinjam	se ne strinjam	niti se ne strinjam, niti strinjam	se strinjam	se popolnoma strinjam
če se z njim/njo lahko poistovetim.	○	○	○	○	○
če mu/ji sledijo moji prijatelji.	○	○	○	○	○
če ima informativno vsebino.	○	○	○	○	○
če me lahko poduči o trendih, idejah, novostih.	○	○	○	○	○
ker je uspešen na svojem področju.	○	○	○	○	○
ker me zabava in nasmeji.	○	○	○	○	○

Q11 (*Bonus*): Kako se ponavadi odzovete, ko vam influencer (vplivnež) prek svoje vsebine ponudi dodatni spletni popust ali bonus na nakup produkta, ki ga promovira v svoji bloggerski vsebini?
Spodnje trditve ovrednotite na lestvici od 1 do 5!

	nikoli	redko	včasih	pogosto	vedno	nisem zasledil/a takšnih akcij
Izkoristim, v kolikor smatram, da produkt potrebujem.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Izkoristim, v kolikor me influencer/ka prepriča, da je produkt vreden nakupa.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Preskočim vsebino z akcijo in se osredotočim na druge vsebine, ki so mi všeč.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Preneham slediti vsebini tega influencerja.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q12 (*NagIgra*): Kaj ponavadi storite, ko ti influencer/ka prek svoje vsebine ponudi sodelovanje v nagradni igri (give-away ali druge oblike) za produkt, ki ga promovira v svoji vsebini.
Označite na lestvici od 1 do 5!

	nikoli	redko	včasih	pogosto	vedno	nisem zasledil/a takšnih akcij
Sodelujem, v kolikor smatram, da produkt potrebujem.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sodelujem, v kolikor me v to prepriča infuencer/ka s svojo vsebino.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Preskočim vsebino z akcijo in se osredotočim na druge vsebine, ki so mi všeč.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Preneham slediti vsebini tega influencerja.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q13 (*SFollow*): Kolikšno število followerjev/subscriberjev bi moral imeti influencer (vplivnež), da bi lahko trdili, da ima le-ta veliko sledilcev?
Opomba: Odgovori za primer slovenskega influencerja.

Vpišite številko:

Q14 (*AFollow*): V kolikšni meri spodnje izjave za vas držijo? Označite na lestvici od 1 do 5!
Veliko število followerjev ...

	se nikakor ne strinjam	se ne strinjam	niti se ne strinjam, niti strinjam	se strinjam	se popolnoma strinjam
mi pove, da je vsebina popularna.	○	○	○	○	○
mi pove, da je vsebina dobra.	○	○	○	○	○
mi pove, da je vsebini vredno slediti.	○	○	○	○	○
poveča moje zaupanje v vsebino.	○	○	○	○	○
mi nič ne pove.	○	○	○	○	○

13

Q15 (*Sponsor*): Nekateri influencerji (vplivneži) sodelujejo s podjetji in prek svoje vsebine promovirajo določen produkt ali storitev. Kakšen je vaš pogled na sponzorirano vsebino?

	se nikakor ne strinjam	se ne strinjam	niti se ne strinjam, niti strinjam	se strinjam	se popolnoma strinjam
Vsa sponzorirana vsebina bi morala biti jasno označena.	○	○	○	○	○
V preteklosti je bila sponzorirana vsebina razlog, da sem prenehal/a spremljati določenega influencerja/ko.	○	○	○	○	○
Veliko število sponzoriranih objav omaja moje zaupanje do influencerja/ke.	○	○	○	○	○
Zaupam sponzorirani vsebini na profilih influencerjev, ki jih spremljam.	○	○	○	○	○
Sponzorirano vsebino toleriram.	○	○	○	○	○

Q16 (*Effect*): Pomislite na svoje pretekle odločitve in dejanja. Kako pogosto ste se v preteklosti znašli v spodnjih situacijah? Označite na lestvici od 1 do 5.

	nikoli	redko	včasih	pogosto	zelo pogosto
Prek influencerja/ke se seznanim z novo znamko ali produktom.	○	○	○	○	○
Ker na znamko ali produkt naletim v vsebinah influencerja/ke, ki ji sledim, se spomnim nanjo.	○	○	○	○	○
Influencer/ka je moje zaupanje v znamko poglobil/a.	○	○	○	○	○
Influencer/ka je moje zaupanje v znamko omajal/a.	○	○	○	○	○
Zaradi mnenja influencerja/ke znamko ali produkt redno uporabljam.	○	○	○	○	○
Zaradi mnenja influencerja/ke sem znamko ali produkt prenehal/a uporabljati.	○	○	○	○	○
Mnenje influencerja/ke pozitivno vpliva na moj nakup.	○	○	○	○	○
Mnenje infuencerja/ke negativno vpliva na moj nakup.	○	○	○	○	○

Končali ste z vsebinskim delom ankete. Prosila bi vas še, da izpolnite nekaj kratkih demografskih podatkov.

*XSPOL***: Spol**

⭘ Moški ⭘ Ženski

*Letnica***: Vstavite letnico rojstva: _____**
primer: 1990

*Izobrazba***: Dosežena stopnja izobrazbe**

⭘ osnovna šola ⭘ srednja šola ali gimnazija ⭘ višja ali visoka šola ⭘ dodiplomski univerzitetni program
⭘ podiplomski univerzitetni program ⭘ doktorski študij ⭘ Drugo:

*Status***: Status zaposlitve**

⭘ zaposlen/a ⭘ nezaposlen/a ⭘ upokojen/a ⭘ študent/ka ⭘ Drugo:

*Stan***: Trenutni stan**

⭘ v zakonski ali zunajzakonski skupnosti ⭘ v razmerju ⭘ samski/a ⭘ ločen/a ⭘ Drugo:

*Dohodek***: Povprečni mesečni dohodek**

⭘ 0 - 500 € ⭘ 501 - 1000 € ⭘ 1001 - 1500 € ⭘ 1501 - 2000 € ⭘ 2001 - 2500 € ⭘ 2500 - 3000 €
⭘ več kot 3000 €

*Regija***: Trenutno stanujem v regiji**

⭘ Gorenjska ⭘ Goriška ⭘ Osrednjeslovenska ⭘ Obalno-kraška ⭘ Primorsko-notranjska
⭘ Jugovzhodna ⭘ Podravska ⭘ Posavska ⭘ Koroška ⭘ Pomurska ⭘ Savinjska ⭘ Zasavska

*DodInf***: Če vam dodatno vprašanje ni odveč, mi lahko zaupate še ime in priimek vašega najljubšega influencerja ali influencerke. Lahko pa to polje enostavno pustite prazno.**

_____

Appendix D: Measurement scales foundations and reliability tests

Survey questions adopted by academic sources

Social media use		
Original		Adapted
"How often do you check your Facebook account?" ***Control Variables – frequency of use****; 9-point scale where 1 = "never", 2 = "less than once a month", 3 = "weekly 2–5 times", 4 = "once a week", 5 = "once a day", 6 = "2–5 times a day", 7 = "6–10 times a day", 8 = "11–15 times a day", 9 = "16 or more times a day"* (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017)		"Kako pogosto uporabljate spodaj našteta družabna omrežja?" ***Control Variables – frequency of use****; 8-point scale where 1 = "nikoli", 2 = "manj kot 1x na mesec", 3 = "1x do 2x na mesec", 4 = "1x na teden", 5 = "2x do 6x na teden", 6 = "1x na dan", 7 = "2x do 5x na dan", 8 = "6x na dana li več"*
Chatting, searching existing friends; School stuff; Social events; News; Music / Rumours / Gossip ***Activities and topics of use of social networking sites;**** Multiple choice* (Chu & Kim, 2011)	To alleviate boredom; Updating to see what's new in this world / Following through on personal interests; To communicate with friends; Need to get updated with information; Getting product information / Looking for deals ***Motivations and activities;**** Classification of diaries* (Halliday, 2016)	Kratkočasenje; Iskanje idej / navdiha / trendov; Navezovanje stikov s prijatelji; Lažja komunikacija z večjo skupino ljudi; Spremljanje dogodkov; Spremljanje novice / informacij; Sledenje znamkam; Sledenje znanim osebnostim ***Control Variables – purpose of use****; Multiple choice*

Drivers	
Original	Adapted
"The information about products which are shared by my friends on social media … I think they are credible." *Information credibility; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"* (Erkan & Evans, 2016)	"Influencerju/influencerki (vplivnežu) sledim, če precenim, da ima kredibilno vsebino." *Credibility driver (trust); 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*
Participants were asked to evaluate adjectives regarding blog posts: Trustworthy – not rustworthy Sincere – insincere *Credibility; 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"* (Mutum, Ghazali, Mohd-Any & Nguyen, 2018)	"Influencerju/influencerki(vplivnežu) sledim,.." „… če mu/ji lahko zaupam." „… če menim, da je njegovo mnenje iskreno.“ *Credibility driver (trust & authenticity); 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*
"SNS ads are a valuable/convenient source of product/service information." *Informativeness; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"* (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011)	"Influencerju/influencerki (vplivnežu) sledim, če ima informativno vsebino." *Credibility driver (informativeness); 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*
"Members of the brand community seem to be successful in the activities they undertake." "Members of the brand community are well qualified in the topics we discuss."	"Influencerju/influencerki(vplivnežu) sledim, ker je uspešen na svojem področju."

	"Influencerju/influencerki(vplivnežu) sledim, če me lahko poduči o trendih, idejah novostih."
Cognition-Based Communiy Trust - expertise; *7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"* (Yeh & Choi, 2011)	**Credibility driver (expertise)**; *5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*
"This YouTube blogger has a lot in common with me." "This YouTube blogger has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine." "This YouTube blogger is like me." **Attitude homophily/social attractiveness**; *factor yes/no* (Lee & Watkins, 2016)	"Influencerju/influencerki(vplivnežu) sledim, ker ima podobne interese kot jaz." "Influencerju/influencerki(vplivnežu) sledim, če se z njim/njo lahko poistovetim." **Self-identification**; *5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*
"SNS ads are fun to watch or read / quite entertaining / often amusing." **Entertainment**; *5-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"* (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011)	"Influencerju/influencerki(vplivnežu) sledim, ker me zabava in nasmeji." **Entertainment**; *5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*
Participants were given a fake Twitter profile and a post example and were asked to evaluate the content based on: High – Low number of followers	Participants were asked to suggest what they consider a high number of followers: "Kolikšno število followerjev/subscriberjev bi moral imeti influencer (vplivnež), da bi lahko trdili, da ima le-ta veliko sledilcev? (Odgovori za primer slovenskega influencerja.)"

	On the basis of their answer, they were asked to evaluate statements: "V kolikšni meri spodnje izjave za vas držijo? Označite na lestvici od 1 do 5!
High – Low Physical attraction Bad – Good Content (Competence) High – Low Intention to build an online friendship High – Low Trustworthiness	Veliko število followerjev ... - mi pove, da je vsebina popularna. - mi pove, da je vsebina dobra. - mi pove, da je vsebini vredno slediti. - poveča moje zaupanje v vsebino. - mi nič ne pove."
Main effects of number of Twitter followers; *7-point Liker scale* (Jin & Phua, 2014)	*High number of followers; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*

Engagement in eWOM	
Original	Adapted
Participants were given a Facebook post example and were asked to evaluate the following statements:	Participants were asked to recall their actions: "Kako reagirate na vsebino influencerja (vplivneža), ki vam je všeč?"
"I would 'like' this Facebook post."	"Všečkam / pritisnem LIKE"
"I would 'comment' on this Facebook post."	"Napišem komentar pod objavo / COMMENT"
"I will recommend this Facebook post to others."	"Delim s prijatelji / SHARE"
eWOM; 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree" (Boerman, Willemsen & Van Der Aa, 2017)	*eWOM; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "nikoli", 5 = "vedno"*

Behavior towards brand-sponsored content	
Original	Adapted
"I would scroll down the blog to avoid sponsored posts/advertorials." ***Consumer avoidance of sponsored posts on blogs**; 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"* (Mutum, Ghazali, Mohd-Any & Nguyen, 2018)	"Preskočim vsebino z akcijo in se osredotočim na druge vsebine, ki so mi všeč." ***Incentives**; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "se nikakor ne strinjam", 7 = "se popolnoma strinjam"*

Effect of attitude towards brand awareness, brand affinity, brand loyalty, purchase intent		
Original		Adapted
"When it comes to (product), I can immediately recall the brand." ***Brand awareness**; 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"* (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014)		"Ker na znamko ali produkt naletim v vsebinah influencerja/ke, ki ji sledim, se spomnim nanjo." ***Brand awareness**; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "nikoli" and 5 = "vedno"*
"My favorite athlete influences me to buy certain brands."	"Advertisements on FB have a positive influence on my purchase decisions."	"Mnenje influencerja/ke pozitivno vpliva na moj nakup."
"My favorite athlete influences me to buy fewer products from certain companies."	"Advertisements on FB have a negative influence on my buying decisions."	"Mnenje influencerja/ke negativno vpliva na moj nakup."

Behavioral Intention Items; 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree" (Bush, Martin & Bush, 2004)	***Facebook advertising intention-to-purchase scale***; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree" (Duffett, 2015)	***Purchase Intent***; 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "nikoli" and 5 = "vedno"

Reliability tests of computed variables

Factor / items	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Factor loadings
Credibility (I follow an influencer …)	**0.667**	**0.729**	
TRUST … if I can trust him/her.			0.616
TRUST … if I asses the content is credible.			0.743
AUTHENTICITY … if I believe his/her opinion is honest.			0.738
AUTHENTICITY … because he/she is passionate about the topic.			0.654
INFORMATIVE … if the content is informative.			0.419
EXPERTISE … if he/she can teach me about new trends, ideas.			0.401
EXPERTISE … because he/she is successful in his/her field of expertise.			0.460
Self-identification (I follow an influencer …)	**0.682**	**0.500**	
IDENTIFICATION … because he/she shares my interests.			0.872
IDENTIFICATION … because I can identify with him/her.			0.872

High number of followers	**0.826**	**0.689**	
A high number of followers tells me the content is good.			0.875
A high number of followers tells me the content is worth following.			0.902
A high number of followers increases my trust in the content.			0.808
Active engagement	**0.632**	**0.695**	
press LIKE			0.663
write COMMENT			0.767
SHARE with friends			0.663
SAVE under bookmarks			0.440
choose to FOLLOW oz. SUBSCRIBE			0.552
write COMMENT			0.503
Incentives	**0.769**	**0.579**	
I take advantage of it if I need the product.			0.737
I take advantage, if the influencer convinces me it is worth the buy.			0.714
I participate if I need the product.			0.801
I participate, if the influencer convinces me to do so.			0.832
Invasiveness	**0.683**	**0.500**	
Because of sponsored content I have stopped following an influencer in the past.			0.873
A high number of sponsored posts undermines my trust towards the influencer.			0.873
Positive eWOM	**0.759**	**0.686**	
press LIKE			0.508

write COMMENT			0.661
SHARE with friends			0.570
choose to FOLLOW oz. SUBSCRIBE			0.217
I take advantage of it I need the product.			0.523
I take advantage, if the influencer convinces me it is worth the buy.			0.495
I participate if I need the product.			0.654
I participate, if the influencer convinces me to do so.			0.695
High effect*	**0.823**	**0.823**	
I have discovered a new brand or product via an influencer.			0.701
I remember a brand, because I have seen it used by an influencer.			0.804
An influencer has deepened my trust towards a brand.			0.816
Due to an influencer opinion I became a regular user of a brand or product.			0.695
The opinion of an influencer positively impacts my pruchase intent.			0.803
Low effect**	**0.731**	**0.682**	
An influencer has undermined my trust towards a brand.			0.787
Due to an influencer opinion I have stopped using a brand or product.			0.811
The opinion of an influencer negatively impacts my purchase intent.			0.822

*High effect as a positive spectrum including: higher brand awareness, higher brand affinity, higher brand loyalty and higher intent to purchase
**Low effect as a negative spectrum including: low brand affinity, low brand loyalty, low intent to purchase

Appendix E: Transcripts of in–depth interviews

Analyses of the in-depth interviews are presented in the tables below.

Overview of participants

General information	Person M	Person R	Person J	Person K
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male
Generation	Y	Y	Z	Z
Year of birth	1992	1987	1999	1998
Status	In a relationship	In a relationship	Single	In a relationship
Education	Bachelor Degree in Mathematics	Bachelor Degree in Sociology and Comparative Literature	Finished Elementary School	Finished Secondary Education (Gymnasium)
Currently	Enrolled in a Master Programme at Faculty of Economics	Working as a stand-up comedian and actor	Waiting for acceptance to the Faculty of Electrical Engineering	Studying at the Faculty of Mathematics
Average monthly income	Student job, below 1000 €	1000 – 1500 €	Student job	none
Interests	Sports, hiking, nature, choir singing	Video games, films and series, literature	Pets, choir singing	Dancing, films, cosmetics, choir singing
Social media usage				
Facebook	only when notified	**most used; more times a day**	once a day	when notified or a few times a week
Instagram	**every half an hour**	2/3x a day	**most of the time**	most used, more times a day
Twitter	/	/	/	/
YouTube	once a day	**once/twice a day**	almost every day	once a day
Snapchat	/	/	regularly	regularly
Pinterest	**twice a month**		/	every now and then
Influencers, referred to	Alja Skrt, Tesa Jurjaševič, Nives Orešnik, Nina Šušnjara, Sarah's	Philip DeFranco, Binging with Babish, CinemaSins	Liza Koshy, David Dobrik, Emma Chamberlain, Jess	Mariah Dolenc, Alja Bitenc, Nika Kljun, Kaja

	Day, Masha Mazi, Barbi in Matic, Jon Olsson		and Gabriel Conte, Čaj z Lano	Karba, Ciril Komotar

The perceived purpose of social media

On social media	GEN Y		GEN Z	
Perception	"Social media is mainly for time-killing; I use them to fill the time, when I am bored or in order to see something new."	**M**	"I see them as a waste of time. Nevertheless I use it to talk to my friends and share details on my life."	**J**
	"It is a space for people to hang-out on the web."	**R**	"I use them to be in step with the times – so I am aware what happens also beyond Slovenian borders." "I see them as a medium to share stories, if you have any."	**K**

Cross-case presentation of concepts of attitudes towards influencer content

On influencers	GEN Y		GEN Z	
Who is an influencer	"I connect all influencers with Instagram, however I do not see all users who say they are influencers as such." "… you have to have a certain number of followers, so you are granted an official account from Instagram and then you can use additional features – as 'swipe up'."	**M**	"I believe these are people, who are the same age as I am and who have in a similar way achieved something more."	**J**
	"I think this is a marketing construct for people, who have many followers. But for ordinary people – not celebrities." "… these people influence the opinions of other people"	**R**	"Those are celebrities as well as my peers, who share their view on the world via their social media channel." "If you want to be an influencer, you need to be the kind of person who is prepared to share his/her opinions with different people – maybe in this way you are even able to change the world."	**K**

Attitude towards influencers	"The idea of influencers arose, because it was exploited for sales," … "for most people the purpose of creating content is for self-promotion." "A person is made influential by his or her followers – those are the ones who judge."	**R**	" … the lesser known people are even more influential than celebrities, because you can look up to them more easily" … "yes, I follow some celebrities but more out of curiosity"	**K**
	"… some are doing it for a living, therefore they need to promote products, in order to get paid. However the purpose of others is to have an influence on society – for example they care for the environment or promote mental health – I like the latter far more."	**M**	"I follow some out of pity. But then they are able to achieve so much! And this motivates me – if they can do it, I am able to do it as well."	**J**
Preferred type of content	"Definitely photos, because they are fastest to consume. Plus, I need no sound, so I can check this type of content also at work."	**M**	"I judge videos by their thumbnail pictures and title text – if this attracts me, I click on the video."	**J**
	"Videos – it is the easiest way to get information, because my brain does not have to do much." … "It is about attention – it has to be really of a big interest to me, in order to start reading something longer. Videos forward information in an interesting and fun way. Or memes."	**R**	"Mostly I like to watch videos on YouTube and Stories on Instagram, because I feel they are more personal and I think the person is talking directly to me…" … "they seem to be more real, because you can irritate photos easily."	**K**

Analysis of drivers towards influencer content

On drivers to follow	GEN Y		GEN Z	
(Credibi-lity) Trustworth-iness	"I see *Alja Skrt* more as a journalist or writer."	**M**	"I follow *Mariah Dolenc* and I think she says what she actually thinks, so I would trust her. On the other hand, I do not watch Lepa afna's channel regularly, so I think I would not rush to buy something, what she would offer me."	**K**
	"Why do I see *Philip DeFranco* as an influencer? Because he delivers information to people and presents them in a way that makes me respect him."	**R**		

			"I am hesitant to recommendations made by brand pages, because I know, they want to sell their own products. On the other hand, make-up artists tell you, what they think is a good product, because they are professionals. However, I am interested in the content from my peers the most, because they do not work on their channels professionally, but out of fun."		
(Credibility) Authenticity	"Passion towards a topic is the indicator of authentic content." … "I know some bloggers are paid to write about certain brands, but I still believe their honesty, because the sponsored content is in tune with their lifestyle, it reflects their passion. Whereas there are others, for whom I think their every post is sponsored – I don't detect the same kind of passion there."	M	"It is obvious when some vloggers produce content just because or because they would like to get noticed or to be popular or get a high number of followers – I don't like that. I like it more, when I feel they create something because it reflects their opinions or because they really like what they do. Because this is their passion. It seems more real."	K
	"The other day, I noticed that five different influencers I follow on Instagram posted a sponsored photo, in which they claimed they use a certain product by the brand called L'Occitane. I can't believe such content."				
	"I am attracted by charismatic speakers."	R			
(Credibility) Expertise	"I notice it, when I search for recommendation in sport nutrition and fitness – I only trust someone who has finished Faculty of Sports or someone, who I know is educated in that topic. Namely, someone who has established a name. If it impacts my health, I double-check who makes the recommendation."	M	/	/
	"I follow YT channels who seem to be informative." … "I usually detect who knows what he is talking about and who doesn't."	R			

Self-identifi-cation	"I follow content, which exhibits what I am occupied with at the moment."	**M**	"If I scroll through my newsfeed, topics which reflect my interests usually catch my eye."	**K**
Entertain-ment	"I follow influencer content, because they have a fun way of transferring information."	**R**	"I prefer content, which makes me laugh. It is very important for me that I like already the first video that I watch." …"Mostly I follow people, who drive around in cars, wondering what they want to buy next, they have fun and do pranks. I don't have anything out of it, but spend some time watching it nevertheless."	**J**
Number of followers	"Many followers tell you, that the content is probably fun or popular, that the work frequency is regular or that the person looks good."	**R**	" … I would believe (someone with a high number of followers) needs to be good … probably he or she is worth to be followed."	**J**
	"I often question the number of followers somebody has, because there has been many affairs with fake followers recently. I compare the number of followers with the content, which was created or the number of video views."	**M**	"I don't care about the number of followers – this doesn't tell me anything."	**K**

Insights on sponsored content attitudes

On BSC	GEN Y		GEN Z	
Incentives	"It gets on my nerves if there are too many coupon providing posts." … "Bonuses/coupons and the like are not convincing, because it seems that every influencer already gets the same code for a discount – then I think to myself – not you too?"	**M**	"If a bonus or coupon is bound to a cosmetic product, which I believe is good or interesting, I participate." … "It doesn't bother me as long as it falls under the context of the rest of the content."	**K**
	"Out of spite I don't want to follow content, which wants to sell bonuses, coupons and similar."	**R**	"Almost every YouTuber can already offer bonuses or coupons, so I do not really care. I follow content, if I believe it is interesting not because I would get something out of it."	**J**
Perception towards	"It is hard for me to judge the credibility of some posts, because	**M**	"I am hesitant towards sponsored posts, because I have the feeling that the	**K**

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influencers with sponsored content	sometimes I think everything is already sponsored content." … "As soon as I see a product featured in a post, I start doubting it is real." … "Subtle is better – I sometimes wonder in which restaurant someone is sitting, because I would like to try the dish on the picture!"		influencer had to praise the product which is being promoted. If the influencer is getting paid, he/she might not necessarily be as honest as if he/she would want to feature the product because he/she found it." "I think there is a difference if you receive a product by a brand as a gift or if you are paid to review it."	
	"If you receive money for creating specific content, your integrity can be doubted, because at some point money starts to tell you, what you should do or say. It seems that everybody has its own price. Although I believe there are people, who wouldn't trade their influence for no money in the world."	**R**	"The person, who advertises a lot within their own content, would obviously like to earn some money."	**J**
Invasive-ness, tolerance and trust of brand-sponsored posts	"All sponsored content would need to be clearly marked, especially because of the younger population." "I don't mind but I don't trust this kind of content much. Although something is sponsored, it is nice that the influencer shows it in the same tune as his/her other content. I like *Tesa Jurjaševič* just because of that." "It deters me, when I see ten girls promoting the same product."	**M**	"I do not tolerate ads at all. It happened that I unfollowed a person just because of that. Basically, I would just like to watch something till the end without some ad content intruding the process. Now I inspect how many yellow dashes there are in between a video already before I start watching. If there are too many, I don't want to watch it although it might be interesting to me. Even five seconds of waiting for the ad to pass is too much for me."	**J**
	"If the sponsored content is at the end of the episode, I skip it, whereas I feel the influencer is being honest, if the sponsored content is mentioned at the beginning or in between the video. It is okay if the promoted thing is exposed directly, I simply skim through it."	**R**		

Overview of engagement behaviour

On content impact	GEN Y		GEN Z	
Browsing content	"I follow lots of people, but mostly I run through their content very fast while scrolling through news feed. Sometimes I watch profiles of some influencers, especially when I need some inspiration or idea."	M	"I watch Instagram stories a lot. Mostly I watch content, which I bump to accidentally. Twice a month I also browse through specific profiles."	K
	"I usually browse only through suggested content."	R	"I often watch what YouTube suggests me on my first page. I rarely search for something very specific."	J
Positive engage-ment	"I comment only on photos of people who I know personally, however I press like on everything that I actually like. Sometimes I share some content with my friends – but it has to be either exceptional or very cute."	M	"On Instagram I would share good content with friends in private messages – but only if something is really funny or interesting. I would recommend a good YouTube video over coffee, but I do not share it directly." … "Me and my friends watch the same channels, so we can talk about them afterwards."	J
	"I don't share content, sometimes I only send a direct message to specific friends. Occasionally, I press like, I don't comment."	R	"I frequently use bookmarks on my profiles, sometimes I also tag some friend under a post, but I do not comment or like that much."	K
Negative engage-ment	"I don't really do anything. Except if this is a person, from whom I often saw content, which was bad – then I unfollow."	R	"I unfollow (bad content) and never watch it again."	J
			"If the content would really disturb me, I would unfollow it. Otherwise I simply ignore it."	K

Overview of the perceived effects of sponsored content

On effects	GEN Y		GEN Z	
Effect: brand awareness	"Sometimes I can recall brands, which were mentioned on certain profiles. *Nives Orešnik* promotes Polleo sport all the time, *Nina Šušnjara* is very vocal about the diet food products of NuMe. I have noticed many girls have	M	"I remember one of the influencers I follow is selling her own shoe fashion line at Alpina – is it *Alja Bitenc*? *Mariah Dolenc* is using mugs from Čas za kavo and when she breaks one, they send her replacements!"	K

	promoted L'Occitane, but I can't really relate anyone specific to it."			
	"Some stuff actually looks interesting. *Philip DeFranco* mentiond Foursquare and SeatGeek."	**R**		
Effect: brand affinity	"If there is too much of a brand, I am repelled by it. For example, I liked Danielle Wellington watches in the past, now I would't like to wear one, because every influencer is promoting it. Exclusivity is important." "Sarah from *Sarah's Day* is talking about some healthy chocolates all the time. I don't know why she persuaded me, that the product is really good. I think I can easily relate to her, even though she lives in Australia. She is so genuine."	**M**	"I compare beauty lounges based on their profiles and then I choose to go to the one that persuades me. But this only happens if I am really into something."	**K**
	"I don't think that sponsored content makes my perception of the product more positive."	**R**		
Effect: brand loyalty	"I and my friends recommend great posts, profiles or products to each other even though we haven't tried it out yet."	**M**	"I only recommend a product further after I try it on my own."	**K**
Effect: intent to purchase	"Yes, I think that influencers' opinions have affected my purchasing decisions in the past. In majority it was about food."	**M**	"No, opinions of these people do not affect what I buy. Only people that I personally know, have this kind of influence. If a product is recommended to me by someone from the US, I don't really care."	**J**
	"I can't remember that I would be affected in this way, but I do not exclude this possibility in the future."	**R**	"It happens often that I am introduced to a product via influencer's content. If I feel like I would like to try it as well, I am deliberately going to shop for this product.	**K**

Appendix F: Overview of differences between followers and non-followers

A sample structure comparison between "followers" and "non–followers" according to generations
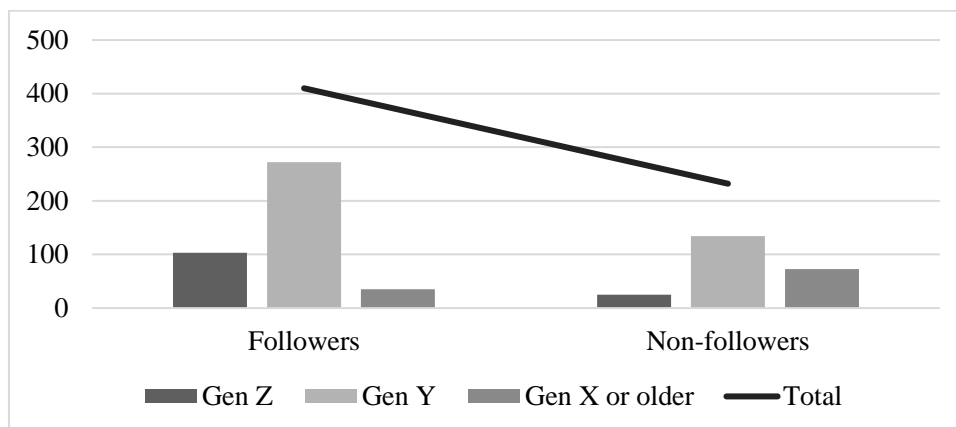
Source: own work. Note: N(followers)=410, N(non–followers)=232.

Overview of basic statistics

Followers	vs	Non–followers
N=410	**Basic statistics**	N=232
66.3% / 25.1%	Gen Y / Gen Z	57.8% / 10.8%
22.7% / 77.3%	Males / Females	33.6% / 66.4%
27.64 years	Average age	34.6 years
41.7%	% of students	19%
52%	Employment rate	68.5%

Source: own work. Note: N(followers)=410, N(non–followers)=232.

Favorite SMPs of "followers" and "non–followers" by frequency of use

Followers N=410	vs	Non–followers N=232
SMP	Frequency of use	SMP
Facebook	2–5 times per day	/
YouTube	once per day	Facebook
Instagram		
/	2–6 times per week	YouTube
Snapchat	once per week	Instagram
Twitter*	once to twice per month	Twitter*
Pinterest		
	less than once per month	Snapchat
		Pinterest

Source: own work. Note: N(followers)=410, N(non–followers)=232.
*Was proven statistically insignificant.

An overview of the purpose of using SMPs: comparison of "followers" and "non–followers" (%)
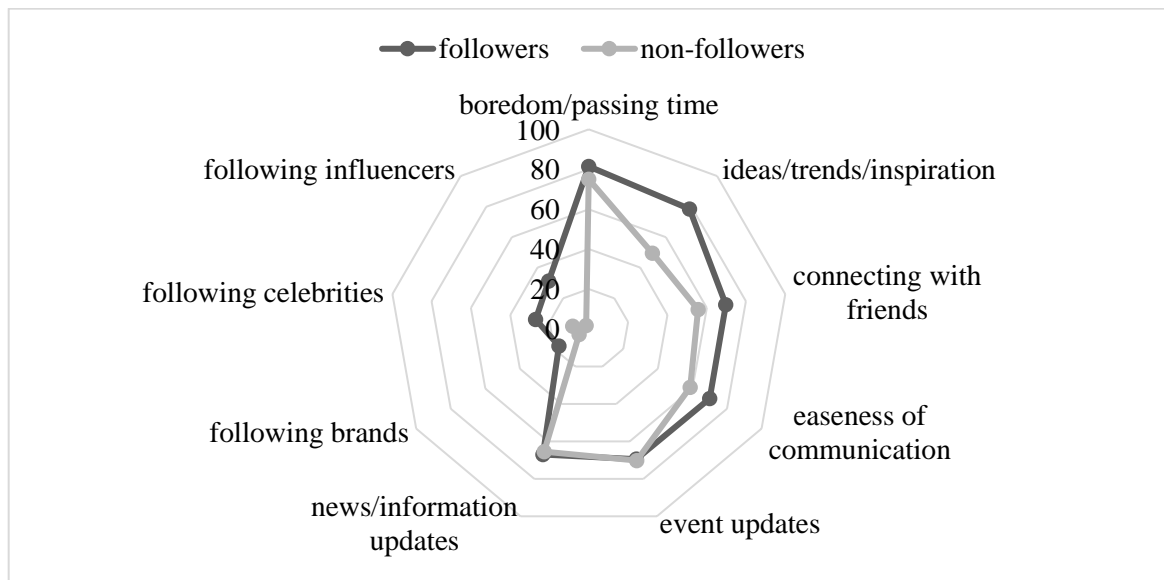
Source: own work. Note: N(followers)=410, N(non–followers)=232.

Appendix G: SPSS results – Hypotheses 1 to 4

H1: *Credibility of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*
H2: *Self-identification with influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*
H3: *Entertainment value of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*
H4: *A high number of followers of a profile drives consumers to follow their content.*

Test used: **One-Sample T-test**
H(0): μ ≤ 3
H(1): μ > 3

Output:
T-Test

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CREDIBILITY combined	375	3,8933	,44963	,02322
IDENTIFICATION combined	375	3,7787	,75931	,03921
ENTERTAINMENT - because it entertains me.	375	4,17	,725	,037
FOLLOWER combined	375	2,5449	,85610	,04421

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3*					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
CREDIBILITY combined	38,474	374	,000	,89333	,8477	,9390
IDENTIFICATION combined	19,859	374	,000	,77867	,7016	,8558
ENTERTAINMENT - because it entertains me.	31,211	374	,000	1,168	1,09	1,24
FOLLOWER combined	-10,295	374	,000	-,45511	-,5420	-,3682

*3 = neither agree neither disagree

Appendix H: SPSS results – Hypothesis 5

H5: *Video content is the preferred type of influencer content by consumers.*

Test used: **Comparison of frequencies**
H(0): All content types were chosen equally frequent.
H(1): Video was most frequently chosen as the preferred content type.

Output:
Frequencies

Statistics

	CONTENT video – preferred type	CONTENT photo - preferred type	CONTENT photo-text - preferred type	CONTENT short-text - preferred type	CONTENT long-text - preferred type
N	375	375	375	375	375
Mean	**2,27**	2,51	2,61	3,52	4,09
Median	2,00	2,00	2,00	4,00	5,00
Mode	**1**	2	2	4	5
Std. Deviation	1,429	1,254	1,079	1,116	1,271
Variance	2,041	1,571	1,164	1,245	1,615
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5

Frequency Table

CONTENT video - preferred type		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	first choice	**170**	**45,3**	45,3	45,3
	second choice	63	16,8	16,8	62,1
	third choice	61	16,3	16,3	78,4
	fourth choice	34	9,1	9,1	87,5
	last choice	47	12,5	12,5	100,0
	Total	375	100,0	100,0	

CONTENT photo - preferred type		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	first choice	**99**	**26,4**	26,4	26,4
	second choice	102	27,2	27,2	53,6
	third choice	86	22,9	22,9	76,5
	fourth choice	58	15,5	15,5	92,0
	last choice	30	8,0	8,0	100,0
	Total	375	100,0	100,0	

CONTENT photo-text - preferred type		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	first choice	**51**	**13,6**	13,6	13,6
	second choice	144	38,4	38,4	52,0
	third choice	104	27,7	27,7	79,7
	fourth choice	53	14,1	14,1	93,9
	last choice	23	6,1	6,1	100,0
	Total	375	100,0	100,0	

CONTENT short-text - preferred type		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	first choice	**29**	**7,7**	7,7	7,7
	second choice	39	10,4	10,4	18,1
	third choice	74	19,7	19,7	37,9
	fourth choice	173	46,1	46,1	84,0
	last choice	60	16,0	16,0	100,0
	Total	375	100,0	100,0	

CONTENT long-text - preferred type		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	first choice	**26**	**6,9**	6,9	6,9
	second choice	27	7,2	7,2	14,1
	third choice	50	13,3	13,3	27,5
	fourth choice	57	15,2	15,2	42,7
	last choice	215	57,3	57,3	100,0
	Total	375	100,0	100,0	

Appendix I: Linear Regression SPSS results – Hypotheses 11 to 12

H11: *Positive eWOM results in higher brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*

Linear Regression Model: EFFECThigh = α + β x EWOMpositive

Output:
Regression

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EFFECThigh	2,6131	,70508	350
EWOMpositive	2,1096	,59116	350

Correlations

		EFFECThigh	EWOMpositive
Pearson Correlation	EFFECThigh	1,000	,459
	EWOMpositive	,459	1,000
Sig. (1-tailed)	EFFECThigh		,000
	EWOMpositive	,000	
N	EFFECThigh	350	350
	EWOMpositive	350	350

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	EWOMpositive[b]		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: EFFECThigh
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,459[a]	,211	,209	,62725

a. Predictors: (Constant), EWOMpositive
b. Dependent Variable: EFFECThigh

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36,582	1	36,582	92,978	,000^b
	Residual	136,918	348	,393		
	Total	173,500	349			

a. Dependent Variable: EFFECThigh
b. Predictors: (Constant), EWOMpositive

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1,458	,124		11,716	,000	1,213	1,702
	EWOMpositive	,548	,057	,459	9,643	,000	,436	,659

a. Dependent Variable: EFFECThigh

H12: *Negative eWOM results in lower brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*

Linear Regression Model: EFFECTlow = α + β x EWOMnegative

Output:
Regression

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EFFECTlow	1,9623	,67722	371
EWOMnegative: write COMMENT	1,20	,518	371

Correlations

		EFFECTlow	EWOMnegative: write COMMENT
Pearson Correlation	EFFECTlow	1,000	,114
	EWOMnegative: write COMMENT	,114	1,000
Sig. (1-tailed)	EFFECTlow		,014
	EWOMnegative: write COMMENT	,014	
N	EFFECTlow	371	371
	EWOMnegative: write COMMENT	371	371

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	EWOMnegative: write COMMENT[b]		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: EFFECTlow
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,114[a]	,013	,010	,67372

a. Predictors: (Constant), EWOMnegative: write COMMENT
b. Dependent Variable: EFFECTlow

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2,205	1	2,205	4,858	,028[b]
	Residual	167,489	369	,454		
	Total	169,694	370			

a. Dependent Variable: EFFECTlow
b. Predictors: (Constant), EWOMnegative: write COMMENT

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1,783	,088		20,189	,000	1,610	1,957
	EWOMnegative: write COMMENT	,149	,068	,114	2,204	,028	,016	,282

a. Dependent Variable: EFFECTlow

Appendix J: Summary of hypotheses results

Nr.	Hypothesis	Result
H1	*Credibility of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*	confirmed
H2	*Self–identification with influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*	confirmed
H3	*Entertainment value of influencers drives consumers to follow their content.*	confirmed
H4	*A high number of followers of a profile drives consumers to follow their content.*	rejected
H5	*Video content is the preferred type of influencer content by young consumers.*	confirmed
H6	*Young consumers actively engage with influencer content.*	rejected
H7	*Incentives motivate consumers to engage with content.*	rejected
H8	*Consumers tolerate sponsored content, but they do not trust it.*	confirmed
H9	*Invasiveness of brand–sponsored posts drives consumers away from following influencer content.*	confirmed
H10	*Consumers feel all brand–sponsored posts need to be transparent.*	confirmed
H11	*Positive eWOM results in higher brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*	confirmed
H12	*Negative eWOM results in lower brand awareness/brand affinity/brand loyalty/intent to purchase.*	confirmed
H13	*Attitudes towards influencer content differ among the generational cohorts.*	confirmed
H14	*Behaviour towards influencer content differ among the generational cohorts.*	rejected