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How Do Influencers Affect Consumers' Decision-Making Process[1]

Influencerlar Tüketicilerin Karar Alma Süreçlerini Nasıl Etkiliyor?

ÖZET

Yeni çağın sosyal medya pazarlamasında, tüketicilerin karar verme süreçlerini etkilemek için influencer'lar kullanılmaktadır. Influencer'lar, tanıttıkları marka ya da ürünü takipçilerine satın aldırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Influencer, tanıtımı ne kadar etkili bir şekilde yaparsa, markanın satışları da o ölçüde artmaktadır. Influencer pazarlaması, marka ile influencer arasında kurulan bir ortaklıktır. Bu araştırmanın amacı, influencer pazarlamasının müşterilerin karar verme süreci üzerindeki etkisini incelemektir. Bu çalışma kapsamında veriler, çevrim içi anket yöntemiyle toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar, influencer'ların "İhtiyaç Farkındalığı" aşamasındaki etkisinin, "Satın Alma Öncesi Karar" aşamasındaki etkilerinden çok daha güçlü olduğunu göstermektedir. Bulguların doğru bir şekilde uygulamaya geçirilmesi için şirketlerin, influencer pazarlamasını kullanırken tüketicilerin ihtiyaç tanıma aşamasına daha fazla odaklanmaları gerekmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Tüketici Karar Verme Süreci, Influencer Pazarlaması, Sosyal Medya Pazarlaması, Satın Alma Kararı

ABSTRACT

In the new age of social media marketing, we use influencers to affect consumers' decision-making processes. Influencers seek to encourage their followers to buy the brand or product they promote. The better the influencer actively advertises, the more the brand sells. Influencer marketing is a partnership between the brand and the influencer. The purpose of the research is to investigate the impact of influencers on customers' decision-making processes through influencer marketing. An online questionnaire was used to conduct data for this study. The results show that Influencers' effect on the "Need Recognition" is much more effective than their effect on the "Pre-Purchase Decision". To implement the findings accurately, the companies should focus more on the consumers' need recognition stage while using influencer marketing.
Keywords: Consumer Decision-Making Process, Influencer Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Purchase Decision

1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of traditional marketing and social media marketing is gradually changing. They increasingly penetrate into each other. In fact, social media marketing is much more efficient than traditional marketing nowadays. We don't use traditional marketing to reach people as much as we used in the past; we are using social media marketing to reach people today. And in the new age of the marketing process in social media, we are using influencers to affect consumers' decision-making processes. It can be the effect of the influencer that makes people consume the product after the content is presented on social media platforms (Beqiri and Bello, 2021). The influencers aim to have an impact on their followers to consume the brand or product they commercialize. They are affecting their followers' decision-making processes by creating different types of content on different types of social media platforms. The followers' decision-making processes get more affected by social media such as Instagram and YouTube than by traditional media such as television and newspapers. So, the channels we use to affect the decision-making process of

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[1] This article was constructed from Nalan Berfin ERGÜN's master's thesis.

consumers has changed over the years but the goal is still to affect them to consume (Schaffer, 2013). Thus, in this new age, we use social media platforms as marketing channels and influencers as brand ambassadors. The more the influencer commercializes well, the more the brand sells, and the more the brand profits. But, how to commercialize well? In most cases, obvious advertisements are not successful. People don't want to see the influencers as advertisers, they don't want the advertisements to shout in their faces. In these circumstances, improving changes in marketing strategies such as reaching the customers and influencing them creates a need for implementation and development according to new effective marketing techniques. Therefore, the need to improve and increase the quality of the implementations; and a need to hide the advertisements come into existence. In other words, consumer-oriented marketing strategies, like product placement, content marketing, and influencer marketing (Beqiri and Bello, 2021). Consumer-oriented marketing is an important factor in consumers' decision-making processes. As stated by Kotler and Armstrong (2012), the decision-making process of a consumer dives into five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. So, in these ordered stages that Kotler and Armstrong mentioned, influencers can get involved in all stages. To influence their followers, the influencers need to insinuate the content to their followers to decide to purchase the product they advertise. As mentioned by Kim and Lennon (2008), a post on social media usually contains both visual and verbal content, which can have significant cognitive effects on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. In reference to Morinez et al. (2007), purchase intention is a situation where a consumer tends to buy a certain product under certain conditions. To sum up, briefly, influencers aim to create content to commercialize the brand or the product to their followers on social media and affect their followers' decision-making process which is the decision procedures and actions of individuals engaged in the purchase, use, and consumption of goods. Influencer marketing is built between the brand and the influencer. It is a complex term that blends the old sense and the new sense of marketing. The influencer inspires the followers to consume the brand's products or services through different social media platforms. Not to be mixed with celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing does more than simply connect the well-known celebrity to the brand. Influencers need to be trusted figures within the niche group and keep their followers loyal to themselves. Influencer marketing can also be used for brands that are in a position of power. With the proper influencer and the right marketing strategy, a brand can successfully manage to have the desired campaign. Understanding how consumers make decisions will help marketers in targeting their potential customers. The consumer decision-making process is the process that consumers go through to make decisions about what they want to buy. It is an important part of marketing because marketers need to know how consumers make decisions in order to create persuasive messages. There are different types of consumers with different needs and desires, which need to be satisfied in order to make them interested in your product or service. The study aims to examine the relationship between the consumer decision-making process and influencer marketing; and how consumers go through to make a purchase decision under the effect of an influencer, specifically in which stage of the decision-making process an influencer can be effective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Influencer Marketing

The word influence can generally be described as the capacity to influence an individual, something, or even just the general situation. An influencer is a third person who has a major influence on the purchasing decision of a consumer, however, it might not be responsible for the decision (Brown and Hayes, 2008). Sometimes the word influencer can be mixed with the word advocate but unquestionably the two words do not have the same meaning. Influencers are usually non-consumers who can recommend a brand or a product while advocates are current consumers who deliberately suggest the brand or the product (Brown and Fiorella, 2013). As stated by De Veirman et al. (2017), influencers are the creators of content that share personal information, opinions, and experiences; they invite people into their daily lives through various social media platforms. Influencers are usually defined as people with a considerable number of followers, mostly on different social media sites like Instagram or YouTube. They might be celebrities, athletes, political figures, or professionals like doctors and lawyers. As Keller and Berry (2003) mentioned, the influencers are activists, they are well known, they affect their followers, they have creative intellects, and they are leaders, with these sets of traits that are directly relevant to the consumer markets. Based on De Veirman et al. (2017), Influencers also provide a quite positive and intimate engagement to their subscribers, since they express their input into their own daily experiences through the content they post. By maintaining this intimate connection with followers, influencers can have an impact on the perception of the brand and the purchasing decisions of many individuals (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers

usually have wide and loyal followers, and companies benefit when influencer posts or references their content or posts. The presentation enables the company to get to its target group in a positive, natural, and meaningful way. When collaborating with an influencer to measure the performance and outcomes of the collaboration, it is important to focus on tangible results. Return on Investment (ROI) calculations are by far the most common way to calculate the results (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). As suggested by Barker (2016), analyzing the scope, engagement, impressions, and conversions of the marketing message to measure marketing campaign effectiveness. With the increase in influencer numbers, it is really necessary that businesses choose the best influencer. As mentioned by De Veirman et al. (2017), how to classify influencers is an issue of accessibility over the follower amounts; although Araujo et al. (2017) considers it, it is the effect and diffusion of the communicated message that matters. According to Momtaz et al. (2011), instead of spending time and effort to evaluate multiple alternatives, consumers rely on influencers to make decisions. Influencer marketing is a component of social media marketing that identifies and comprises people who have an impact on a particular target audience or have a piece in a campaign of an organization against risen scope, purchases, or commitment. As claimed by the Association of National Advertisers (2018), it focuses on targeting people, influencing potential consumers; and deciding on marketing actions around such people to advertise a brand message to the wider market. Influencer marketing is one of the most effective and efficient marketing tactics that one can employ. It's a wonderful way to reach the target market and raise awareness of the brand. As stated by De Veirman et al. (2017), influencer marketing has become essential to a brand's marketing strategies as consumers focus more on other people's opinions when purchasing products. Influencer marketing also allows brands to reach a wider and more targeted audience in a quicker and less expensive way when compared to other forms of advertising (Evans et al., 2017). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012), it cultivates opinion leaders and lets the opinion leaders distribute the data about a good or service in their communities to others. Through influencer marketing, instead of actively appealing to a wide number of consumers, a brand encourages or compensates influencers for having the message out on their behalf. Influencer marketing is a method for finding individuals who have a significant effect on the industry or target audience of a business. A company forms a collaboration with the influencer through an influencer marketing campaign, in which the influencer decides to introduce its followers to the brand's messages or content. For marketing activities, businesses are more and more dependent on influencer marketing to be able to spread content to a large number of people on social media. Influencer marketing has allowed marketers to understand that a change of strategy is needed. Nowadays, businesses are embracing the value that is created by influencer marketing, and therefore they are decided to promote themselves according to this type of marketing (Litterio et al., 2017). Because people trust influencers more than any company to sell a product, direct marketing is no longer as effective as it has been in the past, raising the need for a branded advertising strategy evaluation. Direct marketing is not achieving as it was in earlier years because nowadays, it is clear to marketers that consumers care more about the influencer rather than the brand's promotions. Among those experts at the forefront of purchasing decision-making, influencer marketing is by far the most remarkable late marketing strategy in a decade. Influencer marketing is generally linked to the general content that influencers post to their subscribers, and can be perceived as more reliable and objective than many other marketing purposes. This allows influencer marketing to be more trustworthy and influential than traditional marketing efforts (De Veirman et al., 2017). The strength of influencer marketing is based on the relationship that the influencer has with the followers oneself. It is one of the most effective strategies used to market a wide range of products and services, including just one of the many referral marketing strategies. A committed follower can consider an influencer as a good friend or an icon to oneself and might idolize some characteristics, whether it might be the influencer's demographics, lifestyle, consumption preferences, or values in life. As stated by Lagrée et al. (2017), influencer marketing is a form of word-of-mouth marketing that is widely used today, due to the growing amount of internet influencers. Currently, social media has made it easier for people to express their views to each other, providing word-of-mouth with a much bigger component of a company's marketing strategies. In the very first place, Consumers simply consider the follower numbers and the popularity of the influencer, but what actually turned out is one of the most critical variables is trust and information (Gustavsson et al., 2018).

2.2. Consumer Decision-Making Process and Influencers

The consumer decision-making process is the process of making decisions by identifying a decision, gathering information, and evaluating alternative resolutions. As stated by Kotler and Armstrong (2012), need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior are the five divided phases of the consumer decision-making procedure. These steps can be a guide for marketers to understand and communicate effectively to consumers and satisfy their needs. The

consumer decision-making process is a critical step in the consumer buying cycle and it's an important part of any marketing strategy. Nowadays, consumers have many more alternatives in their decision-making process because of the increasing number of brands and products. Influencers have a more significant scope than before on consumers with easy access to the internet today.

The first stage of the consumer decision-making process is the need recognition stage. In the need recognition stage, the consumer evaluates the need to determine the good to satisfy the need (Park and Cho, 2012). As it is stated by Jaakonmäki et al. (2017), influencers can create a sense of need among consumers by only showing and recommending a product on their social media accounts in this stage of the consumer decision-making process. Also, influencers focus on giving related content about the product that they show on their social media accounts (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). The content includes the sharing of their personal experience with a variety of products tested and sponsored by companies (Kembau and Mekel, 2014). This increases the awareness of the brand among consumers and encourages consumers to purchase the specific product recommended by the influencers (Kembau and Mekel, 2014; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017).

The second stage of the consumer decision-making process is the information search. When the need has been understood by the consumer, the information search starts on different channels about the good that could satisfy the consumer's recognized need (Park and Cho, 2012). The search for information can be conducted in two steps. First, consumer attention increases and starts to grow awareness of all possible and various goods that might be proper to satisfy the needs. Second, the consumer tries to receive more information about the various models, brands, and features of the products so that the consumer can find the proper product that could probably satisfy their needs (Comegys et al., 2006). In this phase of the process, an influencer fills in as a data supplier (Liu et al., 2015). Based on Escalas and Bettman (2003), as consumers lack some information, experience, or knowledge about the product that they are interested in, they continue to look to influencers to access the information that they need to get to make a purchase.

The third stage of the consumer decision-making process is the evaluation of alternatives. Once data has been gathered on a variety of products, the consumer is now evaluating the different alternatives that have been found. As stated by Comegys et al. (2006), at least a few appropriate criteria must be fulfilled before the purchasing of the product is even considered by the consumer. The customer begins by evaluating each product choice by comparing the possible advantages of the product, such as price, product information, brand, guarantee, and size, by consumer needs. Afterward, the consumer chooses which alternative is better to meet the needs and wants; and eliminates all other alternatives (Park and Cho, 2012). The main objective for consumers at this point in the decision-making process is to evaluate the alternatives that could satisfy their needs more adequately than the alternatives chosen at the start of the purchase decision (Valck et al., 2013). As influencers suggest a wide range of products or services on their social media accounts, a consumer usually stands with a variety of alternatives to choose from (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Hence, consumers trust the information provided by the influencers at this point in the process, therefore, the consumer can evaluate the product that the influencer suggests and whether to purchase it (Escalas and Bettman, 2003).

The fourth stage of the consumer decision-making process is the purchase decision. When the evaluation process is complete, the consumer makes the purchasing decision. This stage can be considered the most important stage of the consumer decision-making process. According to Comegys et al. (2006), when a consumer is satisfied with the data gathered and evaluated the product that could be worth purchasing, then the consumer chooses which product meets the need better. Moreover, the effect of the influencers is important when the consumer decides whether to conclude the actual purchase or not (Yand, He, and Lee, 2007; Valck et al., 2013). Influencers can often be seen as advisers during this stage of the process, and the consumers look for advice when they decide whether to make a purchase or not (Valck et al., 2013). When the consumer is hesitant about what product to purchase, the consumer begins to look to the influencer to find the final data that could be the last phase in the actual purchasing process (Hsu et al., 2013). Consumers usually make spontaneous decisions because of the influence of the influencers, they purchase one product over another while it was planned from the start (Kembau and Mekel, 2014).

The fifth stage of the consumer decision-making process is post-purchase behavior. When the actual purchase is concluded, the consumer progresses to the final stage of the purchase decision process. At this stage of the process, the consumer evaluates the needs and determines whether the product satisfies the purpose and the need, also, whether the consumer considers future purchases of that product (Comegys et al., 2006). According to Comegys et al. (2006), there are two sorts of post-purchase behavior; post-

purchase satisfaction which underlines the satisfaction got from the purchased product, and post-purchase action which affects the degree of commitment delivered accordingly. When consumers seek to make themselves more alike to influencers, while the result of the expected satisfaction of the product ends up giving a similar result as it gave the influencers who suggested it then the post-purchase experience of the product may bring commitment (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). This implies that if the real result of the product is remarkably similar to the experience shared in the review by the influencer, the consumer would be certain enough to feel that the most proper product has been purchased (Forbes, 2016). As it is referenced by Valck et al. (2013), not only increases commitment toward the brand behind the suggested product but also increases commitment toward influencers in the way that consumers may tend to seek their information and suggestions in the future.

Consumers may not trust influencers before the impact is properly maintained. Thus, expertise relates to the ability of influencers can deliver proper, efficient, and applicable expertise or knowledge to attract users. The expertise mainly relies on the influencers who hold and delivers the knowledge or experience to the potential consumers (Patzer, 1983). Therefore, these hypotheses are developed:

H1: Influencer's expertise can affect the need recognition stage of the decision-making process.

H2: Influencer's expertise can affect the information search stage of the decision-making process.

H3: Influencer's expertise can affect the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

Homophily guides the resemblance of demographic aspects, lifestyles, and interests (Ruef et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2007). Homophily can improve consumers' sense of involvement in the use of products and decrease the risk of consumers' purchase, thus making consumers trust an advertisement. Prior analyses have revealed that homophily is of significant importance to the data consumers receive, the attitudes they develop, and the relations they encounter (Brown et al., 2007). Therefore, these hypotheses are developed:

H4: Influencer's homophily can affect the need recognition stage of the decision-making process.

H5: Influencer's homophily can affect the information search stage of the decision-making process.

H6: Influencer's homophily can affect the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

Consumers' image satisfaction with influencers and advertisement conviction in branded posts are positively related to the flourishing performance of influence (Li and Peng, 2021). Image satisfaction relates to target customers' general awareness and positive appraisal of influencers' effectiveness (Scheer and Stern, 1992). The source characteristics of an influencer could increase potential customers' image satisfaction and marketing trust, impacting purchasing decisions (Li and Peng, 2021). Therefore, these hypotheses are developed:

H7: Influencer's image satisfaction can affect the need recognition stage of the decision-making process.

H8: Influencer's image satisfaction can affect the information search stage of the decision-making process.

H9: Influencer's image satisfaction can affect the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

3.METHODOLOGY

The study has aimed to search how influencers affect consumers' decision-making processes. Thus, the dependent variable in this study was the decision making and the independent variable was the effect of the influencer. In order to answer the research question of how influencers affect consumer decision-making, a descriptive research design was designed. To collect data and analyze it statistically, a questionnaire as a qualitative method helps test research hypotheses and measure the effect of influencer marketing on consumers' decision-making processes. The primary data collection method for this study is conducting an online questionnaire. Based on Saunders et al. (2009), questionnaires should not be overextended either in length or in the degree of complexity. The information gathered from the review of the literature was used for the conceptual framework. In order to reach a broad number of applicants in a short period, online questionnaires are the ideal approach to use to conduct primary data due to their small cost and fast response. Furthermore, by using an online questionnaire, the analysis of the results would be pretty easy due to the simplification of information assessment.

3.1. Data Collection and Sampling

A questionnaire was selected as the data collection instrument for this study. The gathering of data and the analysis of responses from the online questionnaire had collected between April 26 and May 16, 2022. The population was defined as social media users over the age of 18 who follow influencers in Turkey. The sampling method chosen for this study is snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a data collection technique that relies on referrals and contacts (Glen, 2022b). It can be an extension of convenience sampling and one of the few methods for drawing samples from hard-to-reach populations (Glen, 2022a).

The first part of the questionnaire was to monitor the usage of social media platforms and measure knowledge about influencer marketing. The second and third parts of the questionnaire are a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to monitor the impact of influencers on the consumer decision-making process. The most suitable scales aimed to use in the questionnaire for this study were as follows. The consumer decision-making process scale used to conduct the second part of the questionnaire is originally provided by Beatty and Talpade (1994), later by Belch et al. (1985), Szybillo and Sosanie (1977), and Jenkins (1979), and finalized by Aoud et al (2008). The scale for the consumer decision-making process was indicated with a total of eleven items in three parts with each part's Cronbach's Alpha value: need recognition (0.72), information search (0.84), and evaluation of alternatives (0.72) of the scale for the consumer decision-making process. The influencer marketing scale used to conduct the third part of the questionnaire is originally provided by Li and Peng (2021). The scale for influencer marketing was indicated with a total of thirteen items in three parts with each part's Cronbach's Alpha value: expertise (0.67), homophily (0.74), and image satisfaction (0.71). According to Vrontis et al. (2021), three of the most popular topics to explain the effectiveness of influencers are expertise, homophily, and image satisfaction. Consequently, thirty-seven questions were added to the questionnaire.

The last part of the questionnaire covers the applicants' demographics like age, gender, employment status, education status, and family income. The questionnaire was designed to measure the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' decision-making and; to examine how influencers can affect consumers, specifically in which stage of the consumer decision-making process can have the most influence. The questionnaire was shared through Google Forms. The questionnaire had posted through social media platforms. The data gathered were analyzed via the statistics calculator DATAtab and IBM SPSS. The questionnaire relies on 272 valid responses. Considerable techniques can be selected in the study in order to gather the data; a questionnaire is the most efficient, accessible, affordable, and time-saving of them (Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece, 2003).

4. FINDINGS

The survey data characterisation provides a comprehensive understanding of the applicants' demographics. The information gathered in the demographics highlights the sample data percentage for gender, age, education status, employment status, and income. The gender distribution of the applicants shows that the majority of the respondents were female, accounting for 61.2% of the sample data. Male respondents accounted for 38.1%, while 0.7% of the applicants preferred not to disclose their gender. Regarding the age distribution of the applicants, the survey data showed that the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 18-44, with 39.8% falling in the 18-24 age range, and 46.7% falling in the 25-44 age range. Only a small percentage of respondents fell in the 45-64 age range 12.8%, and only 0.7% were 65 or older. In terms of education status, the survey data showed that the majority of the applicants held a Bachelor's degree, accounting for 61.5% of the sample data. Around a quarter of the respondents 25% held a Master's degree, while only a small percentage of respondents held a Ph.D. 3.1%, an associate's degree 5.2%, or another type of education 0.7%. The employment status of the applicants showed that the majority of the respondents were employed 72.8%, followed by students 18.8%, retired 5.2%, and unemployed 1%. Only a small percentage of respondents identified as having another employment status 2.1%. Finally, the survey data revealed the income distribution of the applicants. Most of the respondents had an income between 5,0001-15,000 Turkish Lira 36.5%, followed by the 15,001-25,000 Turkish Lira income bracket 21.8%. A total of 19.6% of respondents had an income between 0-5,000 Turkish Lira, while 14.7% had an income between 25,001-35,000 Turkish Lira. The remaining 7.4% of respondents had an income of 35,001 Turkish Lira or more. Overall, the demographics provides valuable information about the applicants' characteristics, enabling researchers to analyze the data. In the analysis part, all variables were subjected to factor analysis and reliability analysis. A simple linear regression had conducted to analyze how the influencers can affect the consumers, specifically at which stage of the consumer decision-making process.

Table 1. Factor Analysis for The Pre-Purchase Decision Scale

Factors	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
The influencer usually brings the idea to buy a product.	,788	
The influencer usually brings make me realize that I need that product.	,857	
I usually realize that is useful to have a product the influencer recommends.	,875	,886
The influencer usually make me start thinking about buying that product.	,822	
I usually visit the social media platforms to look for different brands of a product the influencer recommends.	,770	
I usually visit the social media platforms to look for different models of a product the influencer recommends.	,831	
I usually examine different brands of a product the influencer recommends on the social media platforms.	,872	
I usually examine different models of a product the influencer recommends on the social media platforms.	,893	
I usually assess the quality of different brands/models of a product the influencer recommends.	,883	
I usually assess the price of different brands/models of a product the influencer recommends.	,810	,937
I usually assess the color of different brands/models of a product the influencer recommends.	,680	

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		,901
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2448,135
	df	55
	Sig.	,000

Created by Nalan Berfin Ergün via SPSS

Table 2. Factor Analysis for The Influencer Scale

Factors	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
The influencer has expertise in product recommendations.	,872	
The influencer is experienced in product recommendations.	,849	
The influencer is knowledgeable in product recommendations.	,858	
The influencer is qualified to make product recommendations.	,848	
The influencer is skilled in product recommendations.	,806	
The influencer has a lot in common with me.	,864	
The influencer is similar to my values.	,866	,967
The influencer is similar to my image.	,845	
I was pleased to receive information about this influencer.	,877	
I was pleased to view information about this influencer.	,859	
I was pleased to collect information about this influencer.	,846	
I like this influencer's content better compared to other influencers.	,810	
I was pleased to interact with the influencer.	,822	

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		,949
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3911,825
	df	78
	Sig.	,000

Created by Nalan Berfin Ergün via SPSS

The modification of the analytical model in this study occurred because both the dependent and independent variables had an impact. As a result, two hypotheses were developed to explore the influence of influencers on the decision-making process. The first hypothesis, H1, posits that influencers can affect the need recognition stage of the decision-making process. This means that influencers can have an impact on a consumer's realization of a need for a product or service. The second hypothesis, H2, suggests that influencers can also affect the pre-purchase decision. This refers to the stage where a consumer is actively considering whether or not to purchase a particular product or service. These hypotheses are significant in understanding the role of influencers in the decision-making process. Due to the fact that both dependent and independent variables had penetrated, the analytical model of this study was modified, and the hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Influencers can affect the need recognition stage of the decision-making process.

H2: Influencers can affect the pre-purchase decision.

The dependent variables of this study are represented by the titles "Need Recognition" and "Pre-Purchase Decision". All of the factor loadings of Need Recognition are greater than 0.70, showing that validity was demonstrated. And, all of the factor loadings of the Pre-Purchase Decision are more than 0.60 which is also showing the validity was established as well. Similarly, the scales for expertise, homophily, and image satisfaction merged in the component matrix. The rotated component matrix could not be performed because the system could not extract more than one component. Therefore, to have a proper dissertation, the scales are combined under the name influencer. The independent variables of this study are represented by the title "Influencer". All of the factor loadings of the Influencer are above 0.80 which shows the validity was affirmed. The analytical model of this study had adjusted because of the merging of both dependent and independent variables. The number of hypotheses decreased from nine to two after the factor analysis, due to geographical behaviors and cultural differences between the original survey location for both scales and the location we conducted our survey. Both H1 and H2 are accepted.

H1: The predictor was the independent variable "Influencers", and the outcome was the dependent variable "Need Recognition". The predictor variable was found to be statistically significant [B = 0.739, 95% C.I. (0.664, 0.813), $p < .05$], indicating that for every one-unit increase in "Influencers" the "Need Recognition" changed by (+/-) 0.739 units. The model presented approximately 58.5% of the variability of 0,585. $F_{(1, 270)} = 381$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.585$, R^2 adjusted = 0.584. So, H1 is accepted.

H2: The predictor was the independent variable "Influencers", and the outcome was the dependent variable "Pre-Purchase Decision". The predictor variable was found to be statistically significant [B = 0.482, 95% C.I. (0.396, 0.568), $p < .05$], indicating that for every one-unit increase in "Influencers" the "Pre-Purchase Decision" changed by (+/-) 0.482 units. The model presented approximately 31% of the variability of 0,310. $F_{(1, 270)} = 121$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.310$, R^2 adjusted = 0.307. So, H2 is accepted.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research results from this study have shown to be in line with other studies that have examined the impact of influencers on consumer decision-making. It has been found that influencers have a significant impact on consumer purchase decisions, which is in agreement with other studies that have also found that influencers have a positive effect on consumer purchase decisions. The results show that Influencers' effect on the "Need Recognition" is much more effective than their effect on the "Pre-Purchase Decision". To implement the findings accurately, the companies should focus more on the consumers' need recognition stage while using influencer marketing. They should spare more effort in building strategies for meeting and creating the needs of the consumers. Thus, creating and satisfying the needs must have been the essential step of their influencer marketing strategies to have a profitable partnership. Influencers' impact on the decision-making process is a phenomenon that has been around for some time now.

However, it is only recently that brands and companies started to take it seriously. The reason for this change in attitude is that influencers have become more accessible, affordable, and effective than ever before. Influencers are now seen as an integral part of marketing strategy and their power has never been stronger than it is now. The word "influencer" is now a popular term in marketing. It refers to someone who can have a significant impact on the purchase decisions of others. Understanding the customer's needs and desires is the key to successful marketing. When a person is about to make a purchase, they may be influenced by many different factors. The decision to purchase is based on what the person wants, needs, and values. The aimed audience of this study is social media users over 18 years old who follow influencers. Since it is not possible to reach the whole audience for practical reasons, it has tried to attain

social media users aged 18 and over through various social media platforms. The confidence level of this study is 95%, and the margin of error is 5.95% as calculated after the survey had been conducted. Based on the primary data gathered through the study's quantitative research, the influencer marketing technique is currently one of the most popular marketing techniques with a remarkable ability to engage a highly relevant audience and create authentic content.

Given the findings of this study, it is strongly suggested that further research should be conducted to more fully understand the impact of influencers on consumer decision-making processes. Because this study is based on quantitative research, a more qualitative section could raise its achievability on a qualitative method, specifically, conducting focus group consultations and conducting interviews with advertising agencies or brand executives that want to use influencers as a bridge, to reach consumers to their businesses; a more adequate analysis over this case would be possible. In conclusion, this study found that influencers can have a significant effect on the decision-making process of consumers. Specifically, it was found that influencers can increase product awareness, enhance the perceived value of a product, and boost the likelihood of purchase. This study was found to be consistent with previous research, in that it suggested that influencers can have a positive effect on consumer decision-making. This research suggests that companies should consider using influencers in their marketing strategies to increase their sales. Building relationships with influencers can be an effective way to tap into the power of word-of-mouth marketing and increase consumer purchase intent.

The results of this study are crucial for companies to understand the impact of influencers on consumer decision-making. The study found that influencers can significantly impact the consumer decision-making process, particularly in the need recognition stage. Therefore, it is important for companies to focus on meeting and creating the needs of their target audience through influencer marketing strategies. This study supports the idea that influencers are a valuable component of marketing strategies and can increase product awareness, enhance perceived value, and boost purchase likelihood. While this study was based on quantitative research, further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of influencers on consumer decision-making processes. Conducting focus group consultations and interviews with advertising agencies or brand executives that use influencers can provide more qualitative insights.

In conclusion, influencers have become an essential part of marketing strategies and have the power to influence consumer purchasing decisions. Companies should consider building relationships with influencers to tap into the power of word-of-mouth marketing and increase consumer purchase intent. The findings of this study support the importance of understanding the needs and desires of the target audience to create successful influencer marketing strategies.

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