DRIVING ONLINE BRAND ENGAGEMENT, TRUST, AND PURCHASE INTENTION ON INSTAGRAM

The Effect of Social Commerce Marketing Stimuli

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: Social commerce, marketing stimuli, online brand engagement, brand trust, online purchase intention.

Research question: What effect does s-commerce marketing stimuli on Instagram have on consumers’ online brand engagement and what is the consequent effect on brand trust and online purchase intention?

Purpose: Building on the stimulus-organism-response model, this paper aims to fill the considerable research gap by developing a deeper understanding of social commerce as a global emerging phenomenon and investigating the effectiveness of social commerce marketing stimuli and its consequences on consumer behavior on Instagram.

Method: The study adopts a mixed-methodology approach, including a web-based survey and a focus group interview, to build a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and account for the social aspects of social commerce.

Conclusion: Based on a sample of 317 international consumers, the analysis demonstrates that all dimensions of social commerce marketing stimuli have significant effects on online brand engagement on Instagram; which consequently positively influences brand trust and online purchase intention. Moreover, the focus group interview complements the findings and provides potential explanations for the discovered relationships.

Format We are aiming to rewrite this manuscript and submit it to the Journal of Electronic Commerce Research. Thus, the choice of formatting has been adapted to follow the guidelines of the journal as well as to meet the requirements for the Master's thesis.
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1. INTRODUCTION

With more than a billion worldwide active users, Instagram has become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world (Abed, 2018; Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014; Instagram, 2019a). Given its great potential and ability to drive engagement for brands, Forbes has labelled Instagram as the most interesting social media channel as well as the most powerful selling tool for marketers (Buryan, 2018; Dishman, 2014). More specifically, in spite of the fact that it is predominantly a photo capturing and sharing application, recent studies have demonstrated that shoppers are increasingly turning to Instagram for online purchases (Haslehurst, Randall, Weber & Sullivan, 2016). To illustrate, 83 percent of users indicate that they discover new products and services on Instagram and 80 percent admit that they have purchased a product they saw on the app (Facebook, 2019a). Consequently, more than any other platform, Instagram is continuously developing new features and tools that provide brands with endless opportunities to influence and reach consumers before, during, and after purchase (Katz, 2019). Thus, with the evolution of social media, social commerce or s-commerce has emerged as a convenient business tool for firms to utilize (Barnes, 2014). For instance, with reference to Business Insider estimates, in 2017 the top 500 retailers generated nearly $6.5 billion from social shopping on Instagram, which is 24 percent more than in 2016 (Schomer, 2019). Yet, despite the increasing popularity and interest among marketers to learn more about Instagram as a potential s-commerce platform, limited empirical research has focused on the phenomenon (Abed, 2018).

S-commerce can be understood as the “the delivery of e-commerce activities and transactions via the social media environment, mostly in social networks and by using Web 2.0 software. Thus, social commerce is a subset of e-commerce that involves using social media to assist in e-commerce transactions and activities” (Liang & Turban, 2011, p. 6). In fact, s-commerce has recently begun to dominate the electronic commerce industry as social media accounts drive the majority of the traffic on e-commerce platforms (Hajli, 2012; Henning-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, Ginsler, Lobosch, Rangaswamy & Skiera, 2010). Similarly, social media platforms are rapidly introducing new s-commerce functions that are highly appealing to retailers’ marketing needs, for instance, the “buy button” or checkout allow instant processing of consumers’ purchases through social media (Euromonitor International, 2015). Thus, given the substantial changes that the emergence of s-commerce has brought to both organizations and consumers, building a deeper understanding about consumer behavior in the s-commerce context has become critical for businesses (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016).

Nevertheless, since the introduction of the term in 2005, s-commerce has been mainly driven by practices instead of by research (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Thus, adopting social media to effectively reach the users in a global marketplace has remained a struggle for many e-commerce companies (Zhou, Zhang & Zimmermann, 2013). While it allows brands to draw millions of international consumers to their online stores, it does not necessarily facilitate consumers’ willingness to purchase their products and services (Bianchi & Andrews, 2018). Additionally, due to the lack of face-to-face interactions, distrust towards the s-vendor is one of the primary impediments of purchase intention in online settings (Kaiser & Müller-Seitz, 2008). Thus, an effective s-commerce strategy must recognize and incorporate marketing stimuli that facilitate consumer engagement, generate continuous and increased desire for brand’s offerings, and build trust towards the brand (Bhattacherjee, 2002; Bianchi & Andrews, 2018; Chen & Barnes, 2007; Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004).

While earlier work has explored s-commerce stimuli in terms of content characteristics, network characteristics, and interaction characteristics, there is a considerable lack of research examining the dimensions of firm generated marketing efforts (Mikalef, Giannakos & Pateli, 2013; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Similarly, there are few known studies that have explored brand engagement as a dimension of consumer behavior in s-commerce (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). These studies have adopted unidimensional brand engagement in self-concept as a relevant construct (Pentina, Gammoh, Zhang & Mallin, 2013; Pentina, Zhang & Basmanova, 2013). Thereby, there is a considerable research gap in recognizing the relevance of multiple levels of brand engagement in the s-commerce environment. Moreover, earlier studies have addressed consumers’ social media behavior as well as how consumers engage and buy through online channels, such as company websites (e.g. Demangeot & Broderick, 2016; Gunawan & Huarrn, 2015; Islam, Rahman & Hollebeek, 2017; Lu, Fan & Zhou, 2016). However, limited work has studied the drivers of consumers’ online brand engagement and the potential consequences, including brand trust and purchase intention, in the context of s-commerce (Bianchi & Andrews, 2018). Thus, given the increased social media participation by consumers and the utilization of Instagram as an s-commerce channel by corporations, this study adopts the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model to develop
a better understanding of these aspects of business marketing in the context of s-commerce on Instagram (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Fournier & Lee, 2009; Hall-Phillips, Park, Chung, Anaza & Rathod, 2016; Ngai, Taoa, & Moon, 2015). The S-O-R framework has been extensively used in prior literature to understand the distinct features that explain consumer behavior in the online shopping context (Animesh, Pinsonneault, Yang & Oh, 2011; Ergülu, Machleit & Davis, 2003; Jiang, Chan, Tan & Chua, 2010; Parboleh, Valacich & Wells, 2009). Building upon these findings, the purpose of this study is to fill the research gaps of exploring s-commerce marketing stimuli, online brand engagement, brand trust, and online purchase intention in the context of s-commerce on Instagram. Additionally, our study aims to guide marketers to develop a deeper understanding about the dimensions of s-commerce and its consequences on consumer behavior to develop an optimal s-commerce strategy. More specifically, drawing upon the stimulus–organism–response model, this study aims to answer the following research question: What effect does s-commerce marketing stimuli on Instagram have on consumers’ online brand engagement and what is the consequent effect on brand trust and online purchase intention? Additionally, despite the global reach of social media sites and the international popularity of s-commerce, limited research examines the phenomenon in an international context (Bianchi, Andrews, Weise & Fazal-E-Hasan, 2017). Thus, this research aims to study s-commerce as a global phenomenon using a highly international dataset.

In the next sections, an overview of the literature regarding s-commerce and brand engagement on Instagram is discussed. Additionally, based on the S-O-R model, the drivers and consequences of brand engagement in the s-commerce context are explored and the formulation of the hypotheses is explained. Furthermore, a discussion regarding the methodology of the research is provided, followed by the presentation of the results of the analysis using data from the consumer survey and focus group interview. Finally, the results, theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and the directions for further research are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section encompasses an extensive outlook and overview of the relevant extant literature utilized in this study, in the area of s-commerce on Instagram. The study is first established with a clear review of s-commerce and what it entails. Secondly, Instagram is analyzed and reviewed as a s-commerce channel to obtain a comprehensible understanding of its capabilities and use. Next, the conceptual model is introduced, beginning first with the online purchase intention variable, then brand trust, online brand engagement, and s-commerce marketing stimuli in the context of Instagram. Finally, the stimulus-organism-response model is discussed as the focal theoretical model used in this study to further support the research.

2.1. Social Commerce

The importance of Web 2.0 technologies and related e-commerce applications has increased considerably over the recent years and facilitated the emergence of new shopping trends, whereby a process referred to as s-commerce allows consumers and businesses to facilitate interaction and more effective online purchases through social media (Stephen & Toubia, 2010). Given the growing interest of academics and an increase in the number of articles exploring consumer behavior on social networking sites, Zhang and Benyoucef (2016) highlight the newness of s-commerce as a necessary research area. Furthermore, due to the complex and rapidly changing nature of the digital landscape, the phenomenon needs continual scrutiny. According to Abed (2018), given the emerging nature of s-commerce, earlier studies have provided a variety of definitions to the phenomenon that is generally understood as the delivery of e-commerce activities through social media environments. For instance, according to Liang and Turban (2011) given the users’ increased participation levels, s-commerce can be referred to as a more social form of e-commerce. In addition, from the information system perspective, s-commerce refers to activities through which people intentionally explore shopping opportunities or shop as they participate and/or engage in a highly collaborative online environment (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Hence, it is important to understand that s-commerce is not a simple fusion between e-commerce and social media sites (Zhou, Zhang & Zimmermann, 2013). Namely, while e-commerce focuses on efficiency maximization through intelligent search engines, one-click purchases and post-purchase recommendations, s-commerce combines shopping goals with social goals, such as information sharing on social networking platforms (Rosa, Qomariah & Tyas, 2018; Wang & Zhang, 2012). In other words, s-commerce embodies four layers, including people (profiles and personal activities), conversations (information exchange), community (links and support) and commerce (purchase) (Hajli,
Shanmugam, Papagiannidis, Zahay & Richard, 2017; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). While s-commerce takes advantages of all four layers to produce value, traditional e-commerce only utilizes the first and the last layer (Dash, Sanaye, Hossein, & Javadi, 2019).

Moreover, Liang and Turban (2011) identify two major types of s-commerce. Firstly, traditional e-commerce platforms can be combined with social applications that aid people in connecting where they generally purchase. To illustrate, Amazon exercises a form of s-commerce on its traditional e-commerce site as the platform contains a significant amount of online consumer reviews (Amblee & Bui, 2011). Secondly, brands can utilize social platforms and add commercial features to guide consumers’ buying behavior where they usually connect (Liang & Turban, 2011). For instance, if an Instagram user sees something they wish to purchase, they can do that directly through Instagram’s interface through the “Shop Now” button, product tags, Shoppable Posts and other s-commerce features (Boyle, n.d.). This study will focus on the latter type of s-commerce.

2.2. Instagram as a Social Commerce Channel
As a mobile photo and video capturing and sharing service, Instagram has rapidly emerged as a new marketing medium over the recent years (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). The platform allows users to capture and share their life moments with their network in an instantaneous manner through a sequence of filter manipulated images and videos (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014). Consumers have the opportunity to scroll through their Instagram feed, allowing them to browse visual content and images comprised of contributions from the brands and pages in which they follow (Fallon, 2014). Users visit Instagram to be inspired and explore things they care about, including content from businesses and brands (Instagram, 2019a). Therefore, marketers have become increasingly interested in exploring the potential of Instagram as a new business platform for s-commerce (Abed, 2018). To illustrate, since its launch in October 2010, Instagram has attracted more than 25 million businesses with more than 200 million Instagrammers visiting at least one business profile daily and 60 percent of the users saying that they regularly discover new products on Instagram (Instagram 2019). Instagram quickly recognized the enormous potential of the platform for the commerce industry and is continuously developing new tools and features that support s-commerce (Magento Commerce, 2018). For instance, Shopping on Instagram enables brands and stores to tag their products on their posts and Stories, allowing consumers to see product details, price, and the link for direct purchase (Instagram, 2019b). Global fashion retailer, Barbour, is one of the corporations that explores Instagram’s potential as a new way of shopping (Facebook, 2019b). According to Laura Dover, Global Digital Communication Manager at Barbour: ”Since we started to use the Instagram shopping feature, our sales from Instagram have increased by 42% and traffic to our website from Instagram is up 98%” (Williams, 2019). Similarly, Adidas CEO Kasper Rorsted recently said in a quarterly conference that “the brand’s 40% jump in online sales in Q1 2019 from a year earlier can be largely attributed to Instagram’s direct-selling features” (Williams, 2019). Hence, since “tapping” or clicking on posts to learn about the products has become the norm and Instagram has become essential to how users are inspired to shop, many other companies have noted a strong lift in sales conversions whenever they adopt shopping on Instagram (Facebook, 2019b).

2.3. Online Purchase Intention
With the proliferation of s-commerce to drive online sales, the online purchase intention of consumers has become an important aspect to further study. Meskaran, Ismail and Shanmugam (2013) define online purchase intention as “a situation where a consumer is willing and intends to make online transactions” (Pavlou, 2003). According to extant literature, “online purchase intention becomes a crucial factor that can predict the effectiveness of online stimuli” (Shaouf, Lü & Li, 2016, p. 624; see also Amaro & Duarte, 2015; Elwalda, Lü, & Ali, 2016; Lu, Fan, & Zhou, 2016; Wu, Wei & Chen, 2008). Moreover, Jamil (2011) proposes that purchase intention has a positive influence on online purchasing and recommended to further investigate this intent online (Lim, Osman Salahuddin, Romle & Abdullah, 2016). In order to satisfy online consumers’ needs and succeed as an important player in the global and competitive market, companies must understand the online purchase intentions (Akar & Nasir, 2015).

In marketing research, consumer purchase intention has been studied as a primary construct in various contexts and related to distinct variables such as perceived value (Shaharudin, Pani, Mansor & Elias, 2010), consumer attitudes (Hidayat & Diwasasri, 2013), perceived risk, usefulness and the ease of use (Faqih, 2013). For instance, Chang, Cheung, and Lai (2005) studied the predictors of purchase intention in online environments and
identified more than 80 variables. Since exploring all the variables that could potentially influence consumer purchase intention is not feasible, our study is hence restricted to investigate the effect of s-commerce marketing stimuli, online brand engagement, and brand trust on purchase intention. Given the ease of sharing and obtaining brand and product related information in social media contexts, consumers have become more informative before making a purchase (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014). Hence, this phenomenon indicates the important role of firm generated marketing efforts and consumers’ engagement in providing information to other users and, therefore, building their trust and purchase intention towards the brand (Toor, Husnain & Hussain, 2017).

2.4. Brand Trust
Trust is one of the focal features of buyer-seller relationships and, therefore, has been a subject of researchers’ interest (Wu, Chen & Chung, 2010). Among many other definitions for trust in online environments, in our paper we adopt a definition by Corritore, Kracher and Wiedenbeck (2003) who refer to online brand trust as the assurance and expectation of consumers that online vendors do not violate distinct characteristics of online settings for their own profits and that they care for customers with honesty, fairness, faithfulness, and trustworthiness. Trust can be studied as a unidimensional or a multidimensional concept (Gefen, 2002). While some researchers adopt the latter construct (Aiken & Boush, 2006; Bart, Shankar, Sultan, & Urban, 2005), most authors have opted for a unidimensional perspective (Everard and Galletta, 2005; Hajli et al., 2017; Hajli, 2014a, 2014b; Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky & Vitale, 2000; Pappas, 2016; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006). Following these contributions, in this study we examine trust as a unidimensional construct.

In an online scenario, customer trust is considered to be crucial for brands (Connolly & Bannister, 2007; Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). With reference to Chang and Chen (2008), trust in any type of e-commerce, including s-commerce, is essential in facilitating buyer-seller interactions, aiding companies to achieve their objectives and enhance consumers’ greater intention to purchase from an online firm. To develop trust within the brand-consumer relationship, companies are increasingly involving their consumers in corporate social media pages (Amblee & Bui, 2011). Since s-commerce is built on social networking sites, characterized by an abundance of user-generated content and lack of face-to-face communications, building trust is particularly important for s-commerce firms (Featherman & Hajli, 2015; Kim & Hyunsun, 2010). In fact, the study conducted by Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky and Vitale (2000) revealed that various e-commerce firms are unable to exploit their economic potential without gaining consumers’ trust. Similarly, many firms claim that gaining their customer’s trust in online environments is one of the biggest challenges (Kim & Hyunsun, 2010). Hence, the lack of brand trust or distrust among online consumers is an important research topic, particularly in s-commerce literature (Kim, 2011).

While previous studies have explored the effects of trust in online business settings, due to their unpredictable nature and lack of face-to-face interaction, only few studies are looking at trust in the s-commerce realm (Chow & Shi, 2014). Some of the studies demonstrate conflicting findings in terms of building brand trust in the s-commerce realm. For instance, Kim and Park (2013) studied the effect of consumer-brand communication on brand trust and demonstrated a positive relationship between the constructs. In contrast, the results of the study conducted by Yahia, Al-Neama & Kerbache (2018) in the context of Instagram showed a negative impact of social interactions with the s-vendor on trust. Given the specificity of Instagram, the authors explained the findings by the platform’s purpose to share images rather than to discuss or to interact. Building upon these findings, our study aims to address the conflicting results, examine trust in the s-commerce setting on Instagram, and explore its link to online brand engagement and online purchase intention.

2.5. Online Brand Engagement
Over the past years, academic researchers as well as practitioners have focused significant attention on consumer engagement (Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson, 2009). Within the consumer engagement literature, consumer brand engagement has specifically received much traction as it has become a ‘new hot topic’ in branding and strategic marketing contexts (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, Hollebeek, 2013; Gambetti, Biraghi, Schultz, & Graffigna, 2015; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). While a variety of conceptual studies have tried to capture the underlying meaning of engagement, the term within the marketing discipline is still evolving (Gardner, 2017). With significant variation across proposed meanings in earlier studies, no single definition for engagement has become the benchmark. While some authors refer to engagement as unidimensional (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009), others demonstrate the multi-dimensional nature of the concept (Hollebeek, 2011). For instance, according
to Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2014, p. 4) consumer engagement refers to “the intensity of an individual's participation and connection with the organization's offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the organization”. In contrast, Hollebeek (2011, p. 6) describes consumer brand engagement as “the level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in brand interactions”. While distinct dimensions have been proposed, a significant proportion of the published work utilize the work of Brodie and Hollebeek (Brodie et al., 2013; Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, Ilic, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014). Thus, as the most widely adopted dimensions, this study will distinguish between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral commitment to an active relationship with the brand (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Wirtz, Den Ambtman, Bloemer, Horvath, Ramaseshan, Van De Klundert, Gurhan & Kandampully, 2013). Specifically, cognitive activity refers to consumer’s concentration in the brand, emotional activity demonstrates consumer’s inspiration or pride related to the brand, whereas behavioral activity involves energy applied when interacting with the brand (Hollebeek, 2011).

Moreover, this study specifically focuses on engagement in the online context, referred to as online brand engagement. Since the concept of online brand engagement is applicable in the s-commerce context (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014), we refer to consumer engagement with a brand as a cognitive, emotional and behavioral commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the brand’s Instagram page designed to communicate brand value (Lin, Fan & Chau, 2014; Mollen & Wilson, 2009; Van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nab, Pick, Pirner & Verhoef, 2010). To illustrate, cognitive engagement refers to consumers’ awareness and interest towards a focal brand on Instagram and may involve activities such as link clicks or viewing a brand’s photos and videos (Riley, Singh & Blankson, 2016). Emotional engagement, however, refers to how brand-related content on Instagram makes the user feel about the brand and consequently build a favorable/unfavorable attitude towards that brand. Lastly, the behavioral engagement may manifest in user-initiated interactions, including page follows, comments, post likes and shares, uploads, and content creation, and as a result, purchases from the brand (Khan, 2017; Riley, Singh & Blankson, 2016).

2.6. S-Commerce Marketing Stimuli on Instagram

According to Erdoğanç & Tatar (2015), marketing stimuli can be understood as the marketing activities that aim to support the brand. Given the social dimensions of commerce in the s-commerce realm, the most evident marketing stimuli for brand engagement includes sales campaigns, personalization, interactivity, and user generated content about the brand (Erdoğanç & Tatar, 2015). These elements have a great potential to work exceptionally well on Instagram due to the visual dominance of the platform (Adobe Digital Index, 2014).

To begin, in this paper we will refer to sales campaigns as the company-generated content posted to Instagram that aims to convert recipients to customers (Cvijki & Michahelles, 2011). For instance, Pura Vida Bracelets, a jewelry company, adopted value-optimized carousel ads on Instagram to increase online sales and improve its return on ad spend, resulting in two times the return on ad spend and 14 times the increase in website purchases (Instagram Business Team, 2019).

Next, personalized brand content, that is compatible to users’ likings, has been noted as one of the greatest benefits of online shopping (Burke, 1997; To, Liao & Lin, 2007). Personalization can be understood as “the perception on the side of the customer as to the degree to which the brand provides differentiated content on Instagram to satisfy specific individual needs” (Erdoğanç & Tatar, 2015, p.192; see also Yang & Jun, 2002). To illustrate, through adopting an omnichannel hyper-personalization, Rocksbox, a growing jewelry membership service, launched a #wishlist idea on Instagram that allowed the company to offer personalized content and product recommendations that were specific to individual preferences of their customers (Dyakovskaya, 2017).

Furthermore, we refer to interactivity as a user’s perception of taking part in a two-way communication with a mediated persona in a timely fashion on Instagram (Erdoğanç & Tatar, 2015; Labrecque, 2014). According to Marne Levine, the COO of Instagram: “In the last month there have been 180 million interactions with businesses, with consumers asking how to contact them, asking them about a certain product, to give an idea, feedback, phone number, whatever it is” (Monilos, 2017). In fact, there are many interactive elements on Instagram, including polls and questions, that connect people and brands by enabling direct involvement in the shared expression (Instagram Business Team, 2019).
Finally, we refer to the user generated content as the content that is posted to Instagram by regular people who voluntarily provide useful or entertaining brand-related data, information, or media and that is accessible to others (Krumm, Davies & Narayanaswami, 2008). With reference to the Social Annex report, compared to branded content, user generated Instagram posts see 50% higher engagement (York, 2017). Consequently, some businesses, including Adobe, BarkBox and GoPro, only post user generated content on their Instagram page in efforts to promote their products (York, 2017).

2.7. Stimulus-Organism-Response Model
Developed by Merhabian and Russell (1974), this study draws upon the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model which postulates that people’s cognitive and affective reactions that influence their behavior are shaped by environmental and brand-related stimulus. Furthermore, consumers’ cognitive and emotional state of mind, such as feelings and thoughts, are related to the organism. The response, however, refers to the resulting behaviors, such as enhanced brand trust and purchase intention (Jacoby, 2002). While the framework has been extensively used in prior literature to investigate and consumer behavior in the online shopping environment (Animesh et al., 2011; Eroğlu, Machleit & Davis, 2003; Jiang, Chan, Tan & Chua, 2010; Parboleah et al., 2009), only few studies utilize the model in the social media context (Dashti et al., 2019). For instance, Zhang, Lu, Gupta and Zhao (2014) applied the S-O-R model to e-commerce by considering technological features as stimulus, and flow, social presence and social support as organism. Similarly, Erdoğan and Tatár (2015) have suggested a potential model to explain the drivers of e-commerce through brand engagement. The model incorporates the social dimensions of commerce and refers to stimulus as e-commerce stimuli in the context of social networks. In addition, authors refer to the organism as brand engagement in social media and consider response as captured through brand trust and purchase intention. It is important to highlight, that the brand engagement online is not the same as brand engagement offline (Zook & Smith, 2016). According to Zook & Smith (2016), offline engagement represents a purer mental engagement, such as thinking about the brand, whereas engagement in a digital environment also involves physical dimensions such as a click, comment, share, or like. Thus, the study challenges the traditional S-O-R model by exploring the behavioral dimension of brand engagement as a relevant part of organism in online contexts.

Building on the work of Erdoğan and Tatár (2015) and adopting the S-O-R model, we aim to recognize which e-commerce marketing stimuli creates positive brand-consumer relationships through affecting consumers’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioral systems. In other words, this study aims to apply and test the suggested framework in the Instagram context to guide marketers to effectively utilize e-commerce on Instagram through creating an optimal marketing stimuli to drive online brand engagements and, consequently, facilitate brand trust and online purchase intention (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Research Model for the link between e-commerce marketing stimuli, brand engagement, trust and online purchase intention.](image)

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Sales campaigns on social media platforms tend to include discounts and coupons and should be fun, engaging, and rewarding for consumers (Erdoğan & Tatár, 2015). Goor (2012) postulates that the use of campaigns, such as promotions and contests, increases the engagement between brands and consumers, which can lead to better relationships and trust (Erdoğan & Tatár, 2015). Furthermore, these value-adding activities can positively affect the purchase intention (Erdoğan & Tatár, 2015; Shukla, 2010). After analyzing 28 brands, Ashley and Tuten (2015) found that 18 brands (64.29%) used photo sharing platforms, such as Instagram, as part of their sales campaigns. This usage, in turn, was beneficial in increasing brand engagement and appeal (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). In fact, the Instagram business community has grown to more than two million advertisers (Instagram
Business Team, 2017). Moreover, in 2016, before the release of the year's biggest movie "La La Land", Lionsgate UK film studio (@lionsgatemoviesuk) launched a successful campaign showcasing ten customized "thumb-stopping" videos targeting particular areas of interest for individuals on Instagram. With the use of short videos illustrating enthralling versions of the film's trailer showing the A-list stars and wonderful sing-along storyline, the film studio drastically inspired Instagrammers (Instagram Business Team, 2017). "As a result, the campaign achieved a 24-point increase in ad recall, an 8-point lift in awareness and a 4-point rise in viewing intent - particularly among its target of younger viewers" (Instagram Business Team, 2017). Hence, based on these findings, we propose that the use of sales campaigns in s-commerce strategies will lead to increased brand engagement on Instagram.

**H1 Sales campaigns on a brand's Instagram page have a positive impact on consumers’ online brand engagement.**

Personalization can include means such as targeted messages, offers and recommendations (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015). Today's digital consumers expect companies to appeal to and accommodate their preferences through collaborative and personalized interactions (Baumol, Hollebeek & Jung, 2016; Greenberg, 2010; Munnukka and Järvi 2014). Therefore, firms are increasingly turning to social media-enabled sales channels to allow a personalized experience online (Baethge, Klier, J., and Klier, M., 2016; Baumol et al., 2016). Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, and Shapiro (2012) claim that social media can be used to facilitate micro-segmentation, where individual customer segments are specifically targeted to cater to their unique needs and preferences with personalized and customized offerings (Baumol et al., 2016). Furthermore, Yang and Jun (2002, p. 78) mention that "it is critical for businesses to engage customers in personalized dialogue and to learn more about their needs to better anticipate their future preferences". Similarly, Gordon and De Lima-Turner (1997) postulated that consumers would be more likely to engage with brand content that is personalized to their likings. Overall, as mentioned by Hajli (2014a) and Erdoğan and Tatar (2015), relationships between e-vendors and consumers are more personal over social media and can therefore positively increase the brand engagement of the consumer on the specific social media channel. Thereby, personalization in the s-commerce context is expected to increase brand engagement on Instagram.

**H2 Personalization on a brand’s Instagram page has a positive impact on consumers’ online brand engagement.**

Sashi (2012) claims that the advent of the internet and, in recent years, the interactive features of social media channels, have led to an increase of interest in customer engagement. Compared to traditional media, social media is a more suitable platform for managing successful interactions with consumers (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015). The interactive nature of social media facilitates the ability to establish conversations among individuals and firms, and effectively involves customers in content generation and value creation. The interactive nature allows customers to share and exchange information with one another as they please (Sashi, 2012). Real time interaction is especially important for consumers to interact with the seller to ask any specific questions, share and exchange their opinions on social media. This two-way communication allows interactivity and is an important driver of brand engagement (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015). Extant literature mentions the importance of interactivity and stresses that “brands should build connections with users as they foster a sense of belonging through the engagement process” (Zahay & Richard, 2017, p. 137; see also Hajli, Shamugam, Papagiannidis, Zahay & Richard, 2017). In fact, previous research has defined interactivity as “a primary antecedent of brand engagement” (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015, p. 192; see also Bolton & Saxena-Iyer, 2009; De Valck, Van Bruggen, Wierengan, 2009; Gillin, 2009). Thus, based on the findings, we predict that if consumers are able to experience two-way communication with the brand in the s-commerce context, it will lead to increased brand engagement on Instagram.

**H3 Interactivity on a brand’s Instagram page has a positive impact on consumers’ online brand engagement.**

User generated content and reviews have become major ways for consumers to learn about company offerings and drastically assist the online buying process (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Branes, 2014; Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015). Increasingly, consumers are turning to social media platforms in order to communicate with others or find information to assist their purchase decisions. Furthermore, Lueg, Ponder, Beatty and Capella (2006) mention that many consumers base their consumption choices on the consumer generated comments on social media. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) claim that highly engaging social media campaigns involving user-generated content (UGC)
are likely to generate commitment from the consumer. User generated content reinforces loyalty to the specific brand and customers are therefore more likely to commit and support the brand in the future (Hoffman, 2010). The author continues to explain the idea that user-generated content can also embed consumers’ favorite brands and in turn contribute to word of mouth (Hoffman, 2010). Consumers are able to share brand-specific content on Instagram through comments, hashtags, sharing posts and directly tagging specific brands (Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014). According to a study conducted by Malthouse, Calder, Kim and Vandebosch (2016), it was discovered that contests, where consumers can create user-generated-content, allow them to actively engage with brands and this can directly affect consumer purchases. More specifically, “positive brand-related UGC exerts a significant influence on brands as it provokes consumers’ eWOM behavior, brand engagement, and potential brand sales” (Kim & Johnson, 2016, p. 99). Hence, we predict that user generated content in e-commerce will lead to increased brand engagement on Instagram.

**H4 User generated content on a brand’s Instagram page has a positive impact on online brand engagement on Instagram.**

Brand engagement accounts for consumers’ interactive brand-related dynamics (Brodie et al., 2011). After extensive research, it is evident that other literature provides clear evidence to the positive impact of online brand engagement on both purchase intention (Appelbaum, 2001; Hollebeek, Glyn & Brodie, 2014) and trust (Hollebeek, 2011). Hollebeek, Glyn & Brodie (2014) claim that analyzing consumers’ online brand engagement can drastically facilitate in enhancing the predictability of consumers’ future purchase intent for specific brands. Similarly, trust is among one of the most important factors to influence online shopping behavior (Kim & Benbasat, 2003; Shah Alam & Mohd Yasin, 2010). Thus, since the positive interactions in relationships facilitate trust in relationship exchanges, companies are increasingly focusing on facilitating consumer engagement and building emotional bonds with consumers (Lambe, Rober, & Shelby 2000; Sashi, 2012). In fact, prior studies have confirmed that engaged consumers are more likely to exhibit favorable relationship quality signals, such as enhanced trust towards a focal brand (Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek, 2011; So, King & Sparks, 2014). For instance, the study by Islam and Rahman (2016) suggested that interactive engagement-centered marketing stimuli, that go beyond simply exposing the consumers to advertising, facilitates consumers’ active participation in the marketing process and potentially instills trust in consumers. Hence, building upon these findings we postulate that facilitating consumers’ online brand engagement on Instagram facilitates consumers’ intention to purchase online and increases their trust towards the brand.

**H5 Online brand engagement on Instagram has a positive impact on online purchase intention.**

**H6 Online brand engagement on Instagram has a positive impact on brand trust.**

Several academics have also found a notably positive relationship between brand trust and online purchase intent (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Keen & Ballance, 1999). With the physical absence of the seller online, brand trust online reduces the feeling of uncertainty (Lowry, Vance, Moody, Beckman & Read, 2008; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Furthermore, according to Ling, Chai and Piew (2010, p. 64), as well as Salisbury, Pearson and Miller (2001), “customer online purchase intention in the web-shopping environment will determine the strength of a consumer’s intention to carry out a specified purchasing behavior via the Internet”. Therefore, by gaining brand trust online, sellers can build long-term relationships with their customers and ultimately predict their online purchase intent (Liat & Wuan, 2014). After a careful review of extant literature, it is evident that most perspectives on online trust agree to the powerful influence it has on purchase intention online. For instance, studies conducted by Jarvenpaa et al (1999, 2000) evidently show the favorable effect of trust on consumers’ online purchase intention (Pavlou, 2003). Moreover, the empirical results of the study conducted by Kim, Ferrin and Rao (2007) show that purchasing intention is directly and indirectly affected by a consumer’s trust (Kusumah, 2015). Thus, the role of brand trust online is of fundamental importance for understanding consumer behavior in the e-commerce realm (Pavlou, 2003). Hence, based on the findings, we propose that brand trust will positively influence online purchase intention in social commerce on Instagram.

**H7 Brand trust has a positive impact on consumers’ purchase intention online.**

All hypotheses are presented in the conceptual model (see Figure 2) which illustrates the potential positive relationships between e-commerce marketing stimuli and online brand engagement, consequent links between online brand engagement, brand trust, and online purchase intention, as well as the positive effect of brand trust on online purchase intention, within the context of Instagram. Restricted by the lack of statistical knowledge, this study is limited to exploring and understanding the direct relationships between the variables and does not account
for potential indirect effects. In other words, the set of individual relationships, rather than the conceptual model as a whole, will be analyzed in this paper.

![Conceptual Model](image)

**Figure 2: Conceptual Model for the link between s-commerce marketing stimuli, brand engagement, trust and online purchase intention.**

4. METHODOLOGY

In earlier work, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been adopted to study consumer behavior in the realm of s-commerce (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). While a majority of the studies adopted a quantitative survey method, only a few studies apply qualitative methods, such as focus group interviews. Furthermore, social commerce marketing is a new and fast-evolving area, where existing theories may be inadequate to effectively provide accurate and complete understandings of the topic. Thus, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, our study adopts a mixed-methodology approach. Firstly, to empirically test the relationships, this paper uses quantitative methods and adopts a natural-positivist perspective to explore the influence of s-commerce marketing stimuli on online brand engagement and the consequent effects on brand trust and online purchase intention (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). This was deemed appropriate since the study aims to determine whether the conceptual framework explains the phenomenon of interest and therefore, tests a theory consisting of variables which are measured with numbers and analyzed with statistics (Creswell, 1994; Gay & Airasian, 2000). Furthermore, a qualitative study facilitated in providing a flexible and efficient method of gathering relevant feedback from a specific target group (Wood, Siegel, LaCroix, Lyon, Benson, Cid & Fariss, 2003). Given the social aspects of s-commerce, by utilizing the qualitative method we aim to illustrate and support the quantitative findings as well as build a better understanding of the consumer perspective regarding the phenomenon of interest.

4.1. Quantitative Stage

The quantitative stage of the study was based on an anonymous standardized questionnaire. Using a convenience data collection technique, the questionnaire resulted in 405 responses. After scanning the cases for participants who are Instagram users as well as follow brand(s) on Instagram, we resulted in a final sample of 317 respondents (207 females: age: M = 22.17, SD = .60; 109 males: age M = 22.35, SD = .65; 1 prefer not to say: age = 50+) from 40 countries. Given the difficulty of defining the population and the highly international nature of the s-commerce phenomenon, the intent was to obtain responses from Instagram users of various demographics and backgrounds (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). Hence, this method supports a highly international dataset. While the sample of 317 respondents does not allow for a broad generalization about international consumers’ online purchasing behaviors, the study provides a step forward towards achieving reliable studies of global consumer samples in the social commerce context (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017).

The study was designed with the online survey platform Google Forms. Prior to publicly sharing the survey, a pilot test was conducted, and data was collected from 80 respondents between the ages of 19 and 55. The pilot test sample was appropriate, ensuring a wide range of participants were included. The pilot test permitted the opportunity to obtain feedback and adapt items if required. During the pilot test it was discovered that respondents were reluctant to complete the survey since it was relatively long and time-consuming. Therefore, the pilot test results were used to improve and refine the survey, including the re-organization of the questions, addition of
introductory questions, and removal of item measures as needed. Particularly, conditions were applied to ensure that individuals who claimed they do not own an Instagram account or do not follow any brands on Instagram were directed to the end of the survey to proceed in submitting.

Once the appropriate changes were made, as a result of the pilot test, the questionnaire was launched online, and the snowball sampling method was used in obtaining results for the questionnaires. Participants were encouraged to share the questionnaire link on their own social networking pages to reach more participants. In addition, personal contact with potential respondents was vital to increase response rate. The survey was open for individuals to complete during the entire month of March.

The survey began with a general briefing about the purpose of the study, after which we asked for participants’ gender, age, nationality and educational level. Moreover, we asked for participants’ previous online purchase experience, Instagram usage frequency, as well as whether the respondent follows any brand pages on Instagram. Furthermore, the survey consisted of several constructs based on the conceptual model variables. ‘S-commerce marketing stimuli’ was the independent variable and comprised factors including consumers’ perception towards sales campaigns, personalization, interactivity and user generated content on Instagram. Similarly, ‘brand engagement’, including emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, and ‘brand trust’ were independent variables. ‘Online purchase intention’ was a dependent variable and was derived from people’s willingness to perform an online purchase from their preferred brand in the future.

To begin, with reference to s-commerce marketing stimuli, to measure consumers’ perceptions about sales campaigns we used three items adapted from Garden (2017). People’s perception about personalization on their preferred brand’s Instagram page was measured based on four items adapted from Kim and Han (2014) as well as Unal, Erci and Keser (2011). To measure respondents’ perception towards interactivity, we used the Interactivity Scale developed by Liu (2003). The original scale consisted of 14-items which were divided into active control, two-way communication, and synchronization. In the survey, the two-way communication facet was used and consisted of four items measuring the extent to which consumers positively perceive the opportunity for two-way interaction with the brand on the brand’s Instagram page. Lastly, people’s perception towards user generated content, related to their preferred brand, was measured based on four items adapted from Elwalda and Lü (2014). Furthermore, to measure brand engagement on Instagram we used the 11-item scale developed by Vinerean and Opreana (2015) that measures consumer engagement based on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions in online settings. The scale shows adequate validity and reliability. Next, brand trust was measured based on six items developed and adapted from Koschathe-Fischer and Gartner (2015) and Garden (2017). Finally, we used three items adapted from Chen and Barnes (2007) to measure consumers’ purchase intention in online settings.

| Table 1: Research variables with number of items and related Cronbach α for quantitative survey |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Variable                                      | # of Items | Cronbach’s α |
| Sales Campaigns                               | 3          | .86            |
| Personalization                               | 4          | .91            |
| Interactivity                                 | 4          | .87            |
| User Generated Content                        | 3          | .89            |
| Online Brand Engagement:                      |            |                |
| Cognitive                                     | 4          | .85            |
| Emotional                                     | 4          | .89            |
| Behavioral                                    | 3          | .83            |
| Brand Trust                                   | 6          | .93            |
| Online Purchase Intention                     | 3          | .92            |
To ensure content validity, the measures for our constructs were adapted from the extant literature to suit the context of social commerce on Instagram (see Appendix A). In terms of reliability, with Cronbach’s α larger than 0.7 all the constructs met the reliability threshold (Cortina, 1993), as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, all items were measured based on a Seven-Point Scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree” and “I don’t know”). Respondents were asked to think about and refer to their preferred brand that they ‘follow’ on Instagram when answering the question items.

Lastly the quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS Statistics software. More specifically, the suggested set of relationships was tested using a linear regression equation. Based on the conceptual model proposed in this paper, we acknowledge that the selected technique does not comply with the statistical principles as it does not test the model as a whole. Hence, we are aware that the results might be skewed since they are not restricted to other variables in the conceptual model. For instance, a regression model assumes clear distinction between dependent and independent variables, however, similarly to the model suggested in this paper, in structural equation modelling such concepts only apply in relative terms (Bollen, 1989; Kowalski & Tu, 2007).

While we acknowledge that testing the suggested conceptual model with structural equation modelling would allow us to reach more valid results, the teaching that we have been provided with does not enable us to run a more sophisticated analysis.

4.2. Qualitative Stage

In addition to the survey, a qualitative focus group interview was conducted to support the research. The focus group consisted of four females and two males, consisting of a total of six participants between the ages of 19 to 26 years old. A total of four countries were represented among the participants: one participant from Finland, one participant from Albania, two participants from Germany, and two participants from France. Fifteen potential interviewees were first contacted through social media, out of whom six provided their agreement to participate in the study. To facilitate a meaningful discussion, all the interviewees were required to have a good knowledge of social media and were actively following multiple brands on Instagram.

According to Krueger and Casey (2002), it is important that researchers choose an interview room that is familiar or neutral which provides a comfortable environment for the interviewees with minimal distractions. Therefore, the focus group was conducted in a quiet group study room to minimize noise while providing a familiar setting to ensure participants were comfortable. The discussion took place mid-May 2019 and proceeded for approximately 80 minutes. For precise analysis of the data, the discussion was recorded with accuracy by using two recording devices. Participants were made aware of this prior to beginning the discussion and were informed that all identities would remain anonymous. Moreover, while one moderator asked questions, the other moderator assisted in actively recording written notes of key findings.

The focus group interview was based on a pre-developed interview guide to ensure that the interview will be conducted in a meaningful and systematic manner (see Appendix B). As suggested by Breen (2006), we began the focus group interview with opening and introductory questions to introduce participants to the discussion topic, allowing them to feel comfortable in providing their honest opinions, as well as obtaining a clear understanding regarding the participants’ activity and engagement levels in the context of Instagram. Follow-up/probing questions were also utilized to clarify and delve deeper into specific topics. According to Newcomer, Hatry and Wholey (2015), using probes allow interviewers to obtain more detail, and more detailed information is more useful. For instance, in order to understand a specific response, respondents were asked a probing question such as “can you please provide an example?” (Newcomer et al., 2015). Finally, the discussion was concluded with the use of ending questions in order to ensure a clear understanding of opinions and allowing the interviewees to provide any last remarks (Breen, 2006). The questions utilized for the focus group were chosen to effectively obtain a deeper understanding of the findings and facilitate the construct variables. Specifically, the questions were formulated in order to provide an explanation for the links in the conceptual model for this study. For example, when discussing the social commerce stimuli variable of interactivity, if participants agreed that it led to more brand engagement, they were encouraged to elaborate on the relationship and to provide examples. With an open discussion, participants were able to elaborate on the relationships of variables and why they believe certain stimuli lead them to certain actions or decisions. According to Wood et al. (2003, p.25), “in-person focus groups permit more flexibility, consideration of nonverbal cues and responses, and generally deeper discussion”. Allowing the interviewees to express emotion and nonverbal reactions facilitated in thoroughly understanding the
5. RESULTS

The following section will exhibit the results and discussion to address the focal research question and the set of relationships proposed in this paper. Firstly, in relation to the hypotheses, the results of the quantitative survey will be analyzed and discussed. Secondly, the results of the qualitative focus group interview will be analyzed to explain and illustrate the relationships discovered between the construct variables.

5.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

After successfully obtaining a total number of 405 survey respondents, the 317 who claimed to own an Instagram account and following a brand page on Instagram were utilized for the relevant analysis. As demonstrated in Appendix C, the total final sample of 317 participants was dominated by the female participants. Namely, 109 (34.4%) were male, 207 (65.3%) were female, and one person (0.3%) did not want to reveal their gender. As for the age, the sample was young and significantly dominated by the 21-30-year-old age group (77.9%). Finally, in terms of education, a majority or 158 respondents hold a bachelor’s degree (49.8%).

Moreover, to obtain a better understanding of online activity and behavior, respondents were asked to share their online purchase frequency, product category most frequently purchased online, and Instagram usage frequency. As shown in Appendix D, of the 317 respondents, approximately half of the individuals, or 151 (47.6%) respondents, claim to purchase products online “monthly”, followed by 92 (29%) respondents who make online purchases ‘a few times a year’, and 227 (71.6%) respondents claim to use Instagram “several times per day”. Hence, the findings indicate a relatively high online shopping as well as Instagram usage frequency among the respondents. Furthermore, a substantial share of the respondents claimed they prefer to purchase “clothing & footwear” online (36.8%), followed by skincare and cosmetics (11.9%)

To analyze the proposed links between the variables in the conceptual model, we performed a correlation analysis to test the relationship between s-commerce marketing stimuli, online brand engagement, brand trust, and online purchase intention (see Table 2). There were significant and positive correlations between all the proposed relationships in the conceptual model (all p-values < .01). Specifically, there were significant positive correlations between interactivity, sales campaigns, personalization, user generated content and online brand engagement. The results revealed a significant trend in the predicted direction, indicating that the increase in the s-commerce marketing stimuli leads to an increase in online brand engagement. Moreover, the analysis revealed a significant link between online brand engagement and brand trust as well as online brand engagement and online purchase intention. Therefore, based on our sample there was enough evidence to conclude that the increase in online brand engagement will lead to higher brand trust and online purchase intention. Finally, similarly to our prediction, there was a strong positive relationship between brand trust and online purchase intention. Hence, based on our findings the increase in brand trust will lead to an increased intention to purchase online.

Table 2: Sample table of Correlations on variables from the conceptual model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Online Brand Engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interactivity</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sales Campaigns</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personalization</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, simple regression analysis was conducted to test the proposed hypotheses (see Table 3). To begin, the results of the regression confirmed the Hypothesis 1, indicating that sales campaigns on a brand’s Instagram page are significant predictors of consumers’ online brand engagement \( (F(1,315) = 91.39, R^2 = .23) \). Furthermore, Hypothesis 2 was confirmed, indicating that personalization on a brand’s Instagram page is a significant predictor of consumers’ online brand engagement \( (F(1,315) = 174.05, R^2 = .36) \). Similarly, Hypothesis 3 and 4 are confirmed, indicating that interactivity \( (F(1,315) = 119.51, R^2 = .28) \) and user generated content \( (F(1,315) = 126.26, R^2 = .29) \) on a brand’s Instagram page, respectively, are significant predictors of consumers’ online brand engagement. Next, a significant regression equation supported Hypothesis 5 indicating that individuals’ online brand engagement on Instagram significantly predicts their online purchase intention \( (F(1,315) = 124.66, R^2 = .28) \). Furthermore, Hypothesis 6 was successfully confirmed, demonstrating that individuals’ online brand engagement on Instagram predicts their brand trust \( (F(1,315) = 87.36, R^2 = .22) \). Finally, a significant regression equation confirmed Hypothesis 7 and illustrated that individuals’ brand trust predicts their online purchase intention \( (F(1,315) = 265.31, R^2 = .46) \).

### Table 3: Sample statistics for online brand engagement, s-commerce marketing stimuli, brand trust, and online purchase intention using linear regression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent: Online Brand Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>11.78</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Campaigns</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>12.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Generated Content</td>
<td>12.67</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent: Brand Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Brand Engagement</td>
<td>10.86</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent: Online Purchase Intention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Brand Engagement</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Trust</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, to measure further constructs and to explore whether s-commerce marketing stimuli has distinct effects on various levels of online brand engagement, we performed a linear regression analysis of s-commerce marketing stimuli on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral brand engagement respectively (see Appendix E). The analysis revealed that interactivity, sales campaigns, personalization and user generated content all had a
significant effect on multiple levels of online brand engagement. In addition, we adopted linear regression analysis to test the relationship between cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement on brand trust and purchase intention. The findings demonstrated that cognitive, emotional, and behavioral online brand engagement are all significant predictors of brand trust and online purchase intention (all p-values < .01). Hence, the findings imply that all levels of online brand engagement are important to consider in the context of Instagram.

Thus, based on the analysis of an international sample consisting of 317 Instagram users, the proposed set of relationships was confirmed. In addition, we demonstrated the relevance of multiple levels of online brand engagement in the e-commerce setting on Instagram.

5.2. Qualitative Data Analysis
The findings of the focus group interview revealed several underlying factors that can explain the significant links between e-commerce stimuli, online brand engagement, brand trust, and online purchase intention. In addition, the informants shed light on additional important aspects that firms should consider when designing an e-commerce strategy for Instagram.

Overall, the focus group interview revealed that consumers exhibit a strong positive attitude towards the ability to shop directly through Instagram. The respondents collectively expressed that shopping through Instagram is easier and less time consuming, as it allows to skip many unnecessary steps and is more fun, as one can easily explore new and exciting brands and products in one place. Moreover, the interviewees admitted the significant temptation and potential of making online purchases more often as they would see brands that they have followed and products that they truly like every time they use the app and browse through their Instagram feed.

With reference to the conceptual model, sales campaigns on Instagram were mentioned as one of the most important stimuli for triggering engagement with brands. Specifically, frequent sales campaigns were deemed effective in facilitating continuous brand engagement and purchase intention among the exciting followers as well as aid brands to gain new potential customers. As illustrated by one of the informants: “When I see a good offer from some brand, I always look deeper into that brand’s Instagram page to see if I find something more that I like. I have also followed some brands only because I know that they offer discounts quite often”. Similarly, another interviewee added: “When I see a promotion on Instagram for M. Moustache I usually go on their website and, one out of three times, I also buy from them”. Given the relatively young age of both survey and focus group participants, the strong effectiveness of sales campaigns to drive brand engagement might be related to the higher price sensitivity among younger consumers and hence, preference for more affordable brands in general. For example, according to Forbes, almost 80% of millennials’ purchase decisions are primarily influenced by price (Kestenbaum, 2017). This phenomenon was illustrated by the respondents’ preferences for product posts that adopt the price tag feature which helps users to see the price of a specific item directly on Instagram as well as discover affordable brands more easily. The participants admitted that the ability to view the price of products motivated them to visit the brand’s page and seek for more affordable offerings and, consequently, more likely to make a purchase. To illustrate: “Sometimes when I see something very nice (on Instagram) I might automatically think that it is too expensive, and I don’t bother to actually search it from the brand’s web page. However, if I can see on Instagram that the product is actually affordable, I would probably more likely buy it”.

Next, similarly to the survey results, personalized brand content was highly valued among the interviewees in terms of driving brand engagement. The findings demonstrated the great potential of Instagram to help firms develop personalized content closely aligned with their followers’ interests. Such content allows brands to truly relate to their target audience and, hence, differentiate from competitors. For instance, with reference to one of the informants: “There are some brands that I am really emotionally connected to and prefer over others as they post content that I personally really really like. For example, there are some brands that do not post just product pictures but also images of nature or some vacation places where I would really love to go”. Thus, posting non-sales related content, aiming to facilitate more personal brand-consumer connection, was found to work exceptionally well in driving emotional brand engagement as well as developing a positive perception and preference towards a specific brand. In other words, personalized brand content allows brands to avoid being perceived as too sales-oriented and aids building stronger and more sincere consumer-brand relationships. To illustrate: “I like when brands recognize their followers and post images about them. For example, I like when fitness brands ask their followers to send them before and after photos or photos where people are using their
products and then later post them to their Stories. Seeing the brand posting images of their followers makes me like that brand a lot more”.

To explain the significant link between perceived interactivity and brand engagement, a majority of the interviewees highlighted the increased efficiency and shorter waiting times when communicating with brands on Instagram: “On Instagram I know that the brands I follow are very fast in responding. So, I like to send them direct messages if I have any specific question. I know that they will answer me almost instantly, compared to emails, that could take much longer”. In contrast, the low perceived security towards Instagram as a communication platform was found to be the main impediments to share personal information and discuss order details with the brands. Specifically, while Instagram allows brands to offer more efficient customer service, there is a need for improving the users’ perception regarding the security of the platform. This is necessary to truly utilize Instagram as a secure shopping platform that provides instant customer assistance. Additionally, the findings revealed that brands that utilize more informal and creative interaction tactics are more engaging. To illustrate: “Fitness brands sometimes let you to ask questions through their Instagram Stories in terms of exercise or nutrition. I really really like that since it makes me feel like the brand really cares about its followers”. Similarly, majority of the informants agreed that the ability to ask non-sales related questions from brands was perceived as less informal, more fun, and engaging. However, some of the participants highlighted the necessity to consider the specificity of the brand and the industry when using informal communication methods on Instagram. For instance, games, question and answer sessions, and other informal interaction tactics, were deemed more suitable for less well-known, affordable brands that offer low-involvement products that people purchase more often, such as clothing and food, and thus face relatively high competition.

Moreover, the findings shed light on the effectiveness of user generated brand-related content to drive brand engagement. Specifically, user generated content was directly related to the formation or destruction of trust and developing positive or negative attitudes towards the brand. For example: “People usually comment for a reason, so if I would see a lot of negative comments under a brand’s post I would probably not trust, like or buy from that brand”. Interestingly, the findings showed that user generated images were deemed more impactful than text-based comments about that brand. To illustrate: “To me, a couple of negative comments about a brand doesn’t really matter if I can see a lot of images of happy consumers actually wearing products from that brand”. Hence, given the image dominance of the platform, user generated content on Instagram has a significant potential to directly or indirectly influence brand trust. Moreover, user generated content was noted to increase the perceived authenticity of brands’ offerings, as illustrated by one of the informants: “It is really important to be able to see regular people wearing products from a specific brand. It lets me see how they look on regular bodies”. Overall, the availability of user generated brand content was deemed highly important for less known brands, since it was perceived as more sincere and trustworthy compared to the brand generated content, and less impactful when purchasing from large well-known brands who are already widely recognized for their quality.

Lastly, the findings clearly demonstrated the changing roles in traditional buyer-seller relationship on social media. As mentioned by one of the informants: “I want a brand that I really like to appear like any other friend I have on Instagram. I want them to post images that really interest and inspire me and be there when I need questions answered. Like a friend, if I am actively engaging with them and they are actively engaging with me, I trust them more”. Additionally, all of the respondents noted a high level of participation and liking towards brand-initiated giveaways and competitions on Instagram. However, in the case of such initiatives, there is a significant importance for brands to be transparent and publicly announce the winners, in order to be perceived sincere and trustworthy. The informants added that being able to see the winners would increase their motivation to continue engaging in such brand-led initiatives as well as facilitate trust, purchase intention and overall liking towards those brands. All in all, the above analysis highlights the necessity of brands to establish friendship-like relationships with their followers on Instagram, characterized by co-creation, transparency, and respect, to drive mutual engagement, build long-lasting trust, facilitate purchase intention, and successfully conduct s-commerce activities on Instagram.

6. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION
The purpose of this study was to explore s-commerce as an emerging phenomenon and investigate the effectiveness of s-commerce marketing stimuli on Instagram and its consequences on consumer behavior. More
specifically, the study built upon the stimulus–organism–response model and aimed to recognize how s-commerce marketing stimuli affects international consumers’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioral systems, and the consequent effects to the development of brand trust and online purchase intent. In terms of the guiding research question, the paper demonstrates the significant potential of driving consumers’ online brand engagement on Instagram through firm-generated s-commerce marketing stimuli, including sales campaigns, personalization, interactivity, and user generated content. Moreover, the research clearly highlights the necessity to facilitate consumer engagement to develop brand trust and purchase intention in online settings.

Based on the international sample of 317 participants, the suggested set of relationships, aiming to explore the dimensions of s-commerce marketing stimuli and its consequences on consumer behavior, was confirmed. It must be noted, however, that given the lack of knowledge of adopting more sophisticated testing techniques to test the proposed conceptual model as a whole, the study does not allow for drawing rigid conclusions. However, taking into consideration the highly significant results, it is very unlikely that the discovered tendencies would differ considerably. In addition, the focus group interview with six interviewees supported and complemented the findings by providing a deeper understanding regarding the relationships in the conceptual model. Overall, the mixed-methodology approach allowed us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of s-commerce on Instagram as an international phenomenon.

To begin, similar to the findings of Goor (2012), the study validated a systematic link between sales campaigns and online brand engagement. The focus group interview complemented the findings and demonstrated that the availability of sales campaigns was deemed as the most important stimulus to facilitate continuous brand engagement, acquire new potential customers, and build purchase intention among Instagram users.

Next, in line with the findings by Gordon and De Lima-Turner (1997), Hajli (2014a) and Erdoğanş & Tatar (2015), our study demonstrated a significant effectiveness of personalized brand-content on Instagram to facilitate consumers’ brand engagement. The analysis of the qualitative data validated this proposition and explained the link through a firm’s ability to differentiate from competitors and build more sincere and personal relationships with its target audience. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that personalized brand content was found to be especially effective in driving emotional brand engagement on Instagram as it aided the development of positive attitude towards a brand among consumers.

Furthermore, similar to prior studies (Bolton & Saxena-Iyer, 2009; De Valck, Van Bruggen & Wierenga, 2009; Erdoğanş & Tatar, 2015; Gillin, 2009) that have reported a positive effect of perceived interactivity and online brand engagement, our findings validated this relationship. Moreover, the focus group interview complemented the findings and explained this phenomenon due to the higher efficiency when communicating with brands through Instagram. Additionally, informal interaction tactics on Instagram were deemed as fun and engaging, yet more suitable for fast-moving consumer goods brands.

Furthermore, in line with Kim & Johnson (2016), our findings provided sufficient evidence to validate the relationship between user generated brand content and online brand engagement. More specifically, with reference to the qualitative findings, due to the higher perceived trust towards regular people, user generated content was deemed as one of the most important factors explaining the formation or destruction of brand trust and developing positive or negative emotions towards the brand. In addition, the interviewees revealed a higher degree of effectiveness of user generated brand content in the form of images, as opposed to text-based comments, to shape intention to purchase from a brand. These findings illustrate the ideas of Buryan (2018) and Dishman (2014) who indicated that Instagram’s ability to drive consumers’ engagement for brands lies in the image dominance of the platform.

Finally, our study validated the findings from the extensive earlier literature and demonstrated significant positive impact of online brand engagement on both purchase intention and trust as well as showed a strong positive effect of brand trust on online purchase intention. More specifically, given the changing role of consumers on social media platforms, the focus group analysis highlighted the importance of brands to exhibit transparency and sincerity towards consumers and aim to transform the firm-consumer relationships into friendship-like bonds to successfully drive online brand engagement, build long-lasting trust, and facilitate purchase intention. Additionally, in contrast to the findings by Yahia, Al-Neama & Kerbache (2018), Instagram was discovered to be an effective platform for firms to build brand trust among users.
Overall, the study demonstrated a significant potential of utilizing Instagram as a s-commerce platform to reach global consumers. Yet, given the complex and rapidly changing nature of the social media landscape, any attempt to examine consumer behavior in the s-commerce realm needs continual scrutiny.

6.1. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Our study aimed to address the significant lack of research evidence on the links between s-commerce marketing stimuli, online brand engagement, brand trust, and online purchase intention on Instagram. At a theoretical level, this article sheds light on the mechanism of social commerce in social media, specifically on Instagram. The study draws attention to the necessity of exploring the firm generated marketing stimuli as an essential aspect when investigating the consumer-brand relationship in the s-commerce realm. In this regard, this study provides an important framework for future research on s-commerce because few studies have explained the relationship between a firm’s marketing efforts and consumer behaviors in the context of s-commerce (Kim & Park, 2013).

Furthermore, the study helps to understand the effects of the s-commerce marketing stimuli on online brand engagement and the consequent effects on brand trust and online purchase intention. In this line, this research confirms the important role of online consumer brand engagement when studying the dimensions relevant for an optimal social media marketing strategy. Moreover, the study challenges the traditional S-O-R model and confirms the importance of recognizing cognitive, emotional, as well as behavioral dimension of brand engagement in online environments. In this regard, the present study contributes to the literature by providing new insights into the relationships between the constructs in online settings.

Finally, by empirically testing the relationships suggested by Erdoğmuş and Tatar (2015), our study confirmed the relevance of the study variables and demonstrated their applicability when studying s-commerce in the Instagram context as a highly international phenomenon. In other words, the research model sheds light on understanding why some s-commerce firms may be more successful in building consumers’ trust and purchase intention in the global s-commerce environment.

At the practical level, by empirically testing the key drivers and outcomes of online consumer brand engagement, this research provides marketers with strategic tools that aid in driving continuous and meaningful engagement between consumers and brands on Instagram. More specifically, by focusing on these key drivers, managers can design more effective s-commerce strategies, including aspects such as sales campaigns, interactivity, personalization, and user generated content.

The results suggest that s-commerce is receiving increasing popularity among international consumers (Bianchi et al., 2017). Therefore, managers with a solid understanding of the factors influencing brand trust and online purchase intention are better positioned to transform their e-commerce firms into stable and trusted s-commerce firms. Moreover, e-commerce firms launching s-commerce sites and start-up s-commerce companies should take the necessary steps to ensure that their managers clearly recognize the importance of not just behavioral engagement, but also cognitive, and emotional levels of online brand engagement to achieve optimal results. This implies that measuring brand engagement on social media based on visible metrics, such as the number of likes or followers, is not sufficient to truly understand the effectiveness of the s-commerce strategy. Instead, managers should focus on building friendship-like relationships and truly connecting with their audience.

In addition, the focus group interview revealed that the perceived effectiveness of specific s-commerce marketing stimuli may vary across industries. Hence, despite the significant findings, managers should carefully consider the specificity of their brand and offerings before adopting the stimuli identified in this study. For instance, industries characterized by heavy competition and low-involvement offerings might find utilizing Instagram in various creative ways more effective and important to differentiate from competitors and facilitate online sales. In contrast, informal interaction tactics, frequent promotional campaigns, or posting user generated content, may be less suitable and necessary for well-known brands who offer high-involvement or high-end products.

Lastly, our study confirms the significant potential of Instagram as a business platform to drive online sales. Given the relatively easy entry to s-commerce, the Instagram marketplace is subject to fierce competition and, hence, forces marketers to find ways to differentiate (Boardman, Hemminger, Blazquez, Ryding, 2019; Zhou et al., 2013). Therefore, international marketers could make use of innovative digital opportunities available on Instagram and adopt creative tactics to facilitate stronger brand-consumer relationships. For example, providing digital coupons, featuring followers in brand content, offering instant customer service, facilitating informal and
non-sales related interaction with the users, as well as utilizing various Instagram shopping features, offers firms an opportunity to develop substantially innovative marketing tactics.

6.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research
This study was carefully prepared and demonstrated significant results, however, some limitations and shortcomings can be considered for further research. After extensive research and the use of structured data collection, the results obtained for this study exhibited high reliability and validity. However, in an ever-changing digital world and with the rapidly changing nature of social commerce, it is essential for researchers to reassess and continuously explore new possibilities and phenomena online.

To begin, in terms of sampling, a more heterogeneous sample mixture can be reached in relation to gender and age. With a more heterogeneous sample, a more distinguishable pattern among different groups can be identified, allowing to receive a generalization of the phenomenon. Furthermore, obtaining a thorough understanding of specific gender evaluation and desires pertaining to social commerce would be beneficial. “There is considerable evidence to suggest that males tend to have more positive attitudes toward advertising than females” (Shaouf, Lu & Li, 2016, p. 624). Moreover, in a recent study, “male users stated more favorable attitudes toward online shopping than female users” (Shaouf et al., 2016, p. 624). Therefore, identifying gender-specific differences within the context of s-commerce, is an avenue for further research.

Secondly, this paper focuses on an international population sample; however, further research can encompass a country-specific focus. With more than forty countries represented in this study, it can be difficult to distinguish the developmental and cultural differences among individuals. Each country in the world has a unique social system and culture as well as differences in technological levels and overall development. In particular, the behavior and culture of consumers in the West may not be applicable to all cultures (Moon, Chadee & Tikoo, 2008). “As different countries have varying inherent values, symbols, and cultures, the behavior of social network users and their intention to purchase on social commerce sites may not be equivalent” (Ng, 2013, p. 610). Therefore, future studies can conduct focused research on a particular country of interest.

Next, further research should account for and control industry differences. This study focuses on a general outlook of consumer behavior on Instagram, accounting for all types of brands and products. However, differences may arise when comparing behavior towards low-involvement and high-involvement purchases. During the focus group interview conducted for this study, it was discovered that participants expressed their divide in considering low-involvement products more on Instagram rather than high-involvement products where more consideration and thought must go into a purchase. Interviewees communicated that they become hesitant in purchasing high-involvement products through a social media platform such as Instagram due to the perception of low security and reliance. According to Han & Kim (2017, p. 30), “it is plausible to assume that a high-involvement product induces greater perceived risk than a low-involvement product”. Therefore, since low-involvement purchases would involve differing perception on a variety of the research constructs presented in this study, as opposed to high-involvement purchases, these should be treated as moderating variables in future research.

Moreover, Instagram is constantly developing its features and it is therefore an important platform to further study. In March 2019, Instagram announced its advanced shopping feature called “Checkout on Instagram”, which will allow users to directly purchase items from different brands on Instagram without leaving the application (Martins, 2019). The in-app purchase feature will soon be adopted and allow consumers to directly purchase through the app instead of being redirected to an external web popup of the brand’s website, thereby shortening the checkout process (Martins, 2019). Moreover, in May 2019 Instagram created a special account called @shop to showcase online merchants that actively sell products through Instagram (Williams, 2019). “The @shop account gives Instagram greater flexibility to behave more like a social influencer in highlighting undiscovered brands, while also driving direct-to-consumers transactions” (Williams, 2019). The vast number of s-commerce features on Instagram are constantly adapting and successfully working for marketers and should therefore be considered in further research.

Furthermore, while the study demonstrated significant relationships between the constructs based on a linear regression analysis, it was limited to exploring simple links between the variables and did not account for more complex indirect effects. More specifically, linear regression which violated the statistical principles and did not support testing the model as a whole. Therefore, the proposed conceptual model suggests that exploring more complex relationships and utilizing more sophisticated testing techniques is a potential avenue for further research.
For instance, the model should be further tested with adopting structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the model as a whole and to explore the indirect (mediation) effect of s-commerce marketing stimuli on brand trust and online purchase intention through online brand engagement (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). According to Lowry and Gaskin (2014), well-established theories rarely involve simple one-way relationships, hence, investigating more complex relationships is particularly important for building theories for the emerging s-commerce phenomenon.

Finally, social media and the capabilities of social commerce marketing are at the early stages; therefore, it is essential to obtain a clear understanding and in-depth view of the various driving factors of online shopping. The model presented in this paper is not inclusive of all variables, hence, further research could draw more dimensions for a more elaborate model. For example, Kim, Song, Braynoy, and Rao (2005) found that various characteristics such as “the reputation and size of the e-commerce site, safety controls, and cost benefits can play critical roles in fostering trust” (Kim & Park, 2013, p. 319). Overall, further research can extend the proposed model presented in this paper by incorporating these factors and thereby providing a more comprehensive and extended insight into the influence of social commerce. With this paper, we hope to open the avenue for further research in the area of s-commerce especially on the prominent social media platform, Instagram.

References


Williams, R. (2019). Instagram unveils curated @shop account to showcase online merchants. Retrieved from: https://www.mobilemarketer.com/news/instagram-unveils-curated-shop-account-to-showcase-online-merchants/554588/?fbclid=IwAR27eitZKFgX1KQ-VPEWbRJqQvPaH2SGED2Zmvj6ufGxE1x9RY-HEe5HWZ


### Appendix A

*Research variables and related survey question items.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sales Campaigns               | 1. Learning about product sales and special offers on my preferred brand’s Instagram page is of interest to me.  
2. Brand content posted on my preferred brand’s Instagram page is a convenient way to learn about sales and special offers.  
3. It's exciting to find good deals on my preferred brand’s Instagram page for products that I like. |
| Personalization               | 4. Personalized brand content on my preferred brand’s Instagram page is a good idea.  
5. I like to see personalized brand content offered on my preferred brand’s Instagram page.  
6. I feel that personalized brand content is customized according to my best interests.  
7. I use personalized brand content as a reference for purchasing from my preferred brand. |
| Interactivity (two-way communication) | 8. My preferred brand’s Instagram page facilitates two-way communication between the visitors and the brand.  
9. My preferred brand’s Instagram page makes me feel it wants to listen to its visitors.  
10. My preferred brand’s Instagram page encourages visitors to talk back.  
11. My preferred brand’s Instagram page gives visitors the opportunity to talk back. |
| User Generated Content        | 12. I find user generated content on my preferred brand’s Instagram page to be useful.  
13. User generated content on my preferred brand’s Instagram page makes my shopping experience online easier.  
14.* User generated content on my preferred brand’s Instagram page makes it easier for me to search and find useful information about products.  
15. User generated content on my preferred brand’s Instagram page allows me to accomplish my tasks more quickly. |
| Online Brand Engagement:     | 16. Using my preferred brand’s Instagram page stimulates my interest to learn more about the company and its products.  
17. Time flies whenever I am browsing on the Instagram page of my preferred brand.  
18. I use my preferred brand and its Instagram page because it captures my attention.  
19. I find my preferred brand’s Instagram posts to be very useful. |
| Cognitive                     | 20. It gives me great pleasure to use my preferred brand and interact with it on Instagram.  
21. I am very interested when I use the Instagram of my preferred brand.  
22. My preferred brand's Instagram posts are entertaining.  
23. My emotional attachment to my preferred brand is strong. |
| Emotional                     | 24. I am willing to collaborate in different Instagram initiatives with my preferred brand in the development of new products/services/features.  
25. I ‘like’ posts from my preferred brand on Instagram  
26. In general, I feel motivated to participate actively on my preferred brand’s Instagram page that I ‘follow’.
### Brand Trust

27. I am confident in my preferred brand’s ability to perform well.
28. I trust brands that I pay attention to on Instagram.
29. I expect brands to deliver on their promises.
30. I rely on brands that I purchase.
31. I trust that brands I purchase are safe.
32. I rely on the ability of a brand to perform its function as claimed.

### Online Purchase Intention

33. It is likely that I will transact with my preferred brand in the near future.
34. Given the chance, I intend to use my preferred brands’ web store.
35. Given the chance, I predict that I should use my preferred brand’s web store in the future.

Note: * item deleted
## Appendix B

**Focus group interview questions guide.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Focus</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Introductory questions | - Why do you use Instagram?  
- Think about your preferred brand(s) that you follow on Instagram. Why do you follow that brand? |
| **Construct Variables** | |
| Online Brand Engagement | - Describe your engagement with your preferred brand on Instagram?  
- What factors, if any, could motivate you to increase your engagement with your preferred brand? |
| Sales Campaigns | - Think about your preferred brand, can you give an example of a sales campaign on Instagram that really influenced you (ex. Promotion, new arrivals, etc.)?  
- How do you feel about the availability of sales campaigns on Instagram?  
- Sales campaigns were found to be highly effective to drive users’ engagement with brands. What do you consider to be the main reasons for this phenomenon? |
| Interactivity (two-way communication) | - How do you feel about the ability to communicate with brands on Instagram?  
- Describe your attitude and thoughts, if any, about brands that are highly interactive with their followers on Instagram. Can you give examples?  
- Ability to interact with brands was found to be highly effective to drive users’ engagement. What do you consider to be the main reasons for this phenomenon? |
| Personalization | - In your opinion, what are the best/worst things about personalized brand content on Instagram?  
- Personalized brand content was found to be highly effective to drive users’ engagement with brands. What do you consider to be the main reasons for this phenomenon? |
| User Generated Content | - What are your thoughts about user generated brand content on Instagram?  
- User generated brand content was found to be highly effective to drive users’ engagement with brands. What do you consider to be the main reasons for this phenomenon? |
| Brand Trust | - In your opinion, what makes a brand trustworthy on Instagram? |
| Online Purchase Intention | - What are the factors, if any, that would motivate you to purchase through Instagram? |
| Ending questions | - When thinking of all these elements we have discussed (sales campaigns, personalization, interactivity, and UGC) which one do you consider to be most important on Instagram? |
Appendix C

Descriptive Statistics: Gender, Age, and Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>65.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
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<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No schooling completed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school, no diploma</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
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<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college credit, no degree</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate degree</td>
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<td>.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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## Appendix D

*Respondents’ online purchase frequency, product category, and Instagram usage frequency.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online purchase frequency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a year</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than few times a year</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Online purchase product category</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing &amp; footwear</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food &amp; health products</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skincare &amp; cosmetics</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting gear</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instagram usage frequency</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times per day</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one time per day</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times per week, but not daily</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one time per week</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one time per week</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>317</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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Appendix E
Sample statistics in relation to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral online brand engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>$R$-square</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent: Cognitive</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>48.25</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>14.54</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales Campaigns</td>
<td>73.29</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
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<td>.30</td>
<td>13.52</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Generated Content</td>
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<td>.21</td>
<td>14.49</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
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<td>.27</td>
<td>10.16</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>.22</td>
<td>8.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent: Emotional</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>152.02</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>User Generated Content</td>
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<td>.27</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
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<td>.28</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>Sales Campaigns</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent: Behavioral</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>109.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>User Generated Content</td>
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<td>Behavioral</td>
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